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THE
GENTLEMAN
OF
THE OLD SCHOOL.

VOL. III.

LONDON :
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THE
GENTLEMAN
OF
THE OLD SCHOOL.

A TALE.

BY
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AUTHOR OF "THE HUGUENOT," "THE GIPSY," "THE ROBBER,"
ETC. ETC. ETC.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

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THE
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CHAPTER I.

“WHAT is the matter, my dear Ralph?” exclaimed Sir Andrew Stalbrooke. “Why do you stand thus gazing at the water? What has happened to you since your note of last night? —for a girl that I met with just now, near the park gate, told me to hurry on quick, and give you consolation.”

“Alas, my dear uncle,” replied Strafford, “I need consolation not a little. When I wrote to you last night, my spirits were beginning to rise again, and now they are sunk more than ever. Edith has just left me, my

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dear sir, Edith has just left me, with the sad dark tidings, that she has received some strange news, which places between us an impassable barrier, and renders all my hopes of obtaining her utterly vain and fallacious. Her words have almost driven me to despair."

"Her words, but not her conduct, I am sure, Ralph," replied his uncle. "I have great trust in her, Ralph. From all I have seen, I feel sure, I feel convinced, that girl would not coquette with any man on earth. If that full upward look with which she sometimes gazes for an instant in your face, be not the aspect of truth itself, nature is a liar, and has stamped worthless metal with the dye of good."

To hear his uncle praise her thus, was in itself a consolation to Ralph Strafford; and he replied, "Oh no, my dear uncle. Truth is a principle of her nature. I can trust to every word she tells me; and her heart, in this instance, is nearly broken, as well as mine. There is neither room for a doubt nor a hope; and grief for her only adds to my own disappointment."

“ But what was this terrible news ? ” demanded Sir Andrew. “ In what consisted the impassable barrier that you allude to ? ”

“ Nay that, ” replied Strafford, “ she did not mention ; but I believe, from what she accidentally dropped — while telling me that she had most solemnly pledged herself not to reveal the secret upon which she was destined to act — and also from some words of Meakes’, while we were speaking of him who is no more, I am strongly inclined to believe that he was not her cousin, but her brother, a natural son of Mr. Forrest. ”

“ Ralph, ” replied Sir Andrew, “ you and I walk darkling in our dealings with a man who evidently has not the daylight of truth in his heart. But I cannot think, I cannot believe, that in this you are right. It is strange to say, that such a suspicion crossed my mind on the very first day that the family were at Stalbrooke. But what you yourself told me removed that impression at once. There was certainly a strong and extraordinary family likeness between the two, more than I ever

saw between uncle and nephew. But still I cannot believe it; I cannot understand it. There is something yet to appear in this business, Ralph; something that I do not comprehend, that I do not understand; but I feel sure that some explanation of it will be ultimately obtained, and I think soon."

"I fear nothing that can make a change in my fate, my dear sir," replied Strafford. "I am glad you came up, my dear uncle — most glad; for the sudden and unexpected destruction of all my hopes had quite overwhelmed me. But I cannot see and think of you and all your kindness towards me, and all the affection which exists between us, and yet continue to think that my happiness is so utterly blasted as it seemed to be."

"We should never think our happiness utterly blasted, Ralph," replied his uncle somewhat gravely, "while our faith in Almighty power and goodness is unshaken. We should trust, first, that God will give us alleviation here; secondly, we should remember how brief is the portion of happiness or unhappiness here,

and forget not the great compensations of the hereafter ; but I can forgive your desponding a little, my dear boy, considering all the circumstances of the case ; and notwithstanding all that you say, and all that you think, I am rather inclined to hope, than not, that circumstances may take such a turn as to sweep away all that you apprehend. Various circumstances have occurred, Strafford, to give me an impression, a feeling, that such will be the case."

Strafford smiled faintly. " Surely, my dear uncle," he said, " you must have met with the dark sort of sorceress whom I have met with several times lately, and who has been preaching up hope in tones of inspiration. She is dressed like — "

" You mean the girl that I just met with," replied Sir Andrew, " who told me where you were, and to come and give you consolation. No, no, my dear nephew ; I have derived no hopes from her prophetic powers. No, no, poor thing ; I told her to go over to Stalbrooke as fast as possible, and give me an account of herself, and what she is about. I'm sure she would

not do any harm, poor thing, not for her life. But still I do not like wild schemes under such circumstances."

"Then do you know her, my dear uncle," demanded Strafford. "Have you ever seen her before?"

"Are your eyes so blind, Ralph?" demanded Sir Andrew, "or have your thoughts been so occupied with other things? I shall begin to think myself a very clearsighted old gentleman. However, I will betray no secrets, if there be any. But my motives for saying what I did, and for entertaining some hopes of a more happy result to this unfortunate business, are very, very different from any that could be suggested by her. Some of them, indeed, are perhaps, not much more reasonable. — However, there are reasonable ones too. In the first place, I feel sure that a man of such strong feelings and passions as this Mr. Forrest, will not be long without discovering, from the very vehemence with which he proceeds, the secret motives upon which he is acting. I had a note too from Lady Mallory last night, assuring me

that she had had no part in, and that it was utterly without her knowledge or connivance that her agent Waters had been present at the coroner's inquest, or that Meakes had been apprehended, who was one of the witnesses of the greatest importance. She also gives me a piece of information of great consequence,—namely, that Meakes was apprehended by a warrant from Waters, at the suggestion, and as she believes, to favour the purposes, of young Forrest. Besides this, in her letter, she tells me that the old man is proceeding in the most violent manner to seek revenge ; that she cannot fully comprehend what it is that actuates him ; but that, from her knowledge of his character, and of his previous conduct in life, he will hesitate at no means, even if they endanger his personal security, to attain the object that he proposes. All this, my dear Ralph, has set me thinking over the little different traits and incidents regarding this man's character, which I have remarked while he was at Stalbrooke ; and I too say, that there is something in his conduct which I do not comprehend. But besides

these, there are various other motives, Ralph, for making me think as I do, and which — upon less reasonable grounds, I confess — have produced a greater impression than even reason and calculation.”

“Indeed!” exclaimed Strafford, with some surprise; for although Sir Andrew Stalbrooke possessed, more than most men, that ethereal quality which is far above any other of those distinctive attributes which separate man from the rest of the visible world, and link him to the chain of spirits, imagination, — yet he held it under steady government; and while he made it subservient to enjoyment, to happiness, and to virtue, giving point, and zest, and spirit to the whole course of life, — he stopped it in its course, when it might have led his mind astray into those wide worlds which are all at its command.

“Indeed! my dear uncle,” he said. “May I ask what such motives can be, as, without the aid of reason, affect even you more strongly than reasonable motives themselves?”

“No, my dear Ralph, no,” replied Sir An-

drew, "you must not ask me to explain them altogether at the present moment. At this very time that you see me, my whole heart and feelings are perhaps more agitated than ever you have known them before. I strive to govern myself, Ralph; I will govern myself, because I know that I have the power to do so. Nevertheless, I may tell you thus much, that, unreasonable as it may seem, I have been thus agitated by a thing usually in itself contemptible and ridiculous, and nine times out of ten used by baseness, folly, and malignity, in order to strike a blow in the dark, without being discovered—I mean an anonymous letter——"

"No one has dared to threaten you, sir, I hope?" demanded Strafford, instantly firing up at the thought.

"Oh, no," replied Sir Andrew; "quite the contrary. The letter stated that it was from a person who had done wrong towards me many years ago, and whose mind had ever since been tormented by contrition the most painful, because the act committed seemed irremediable. It assured me further, that the act had origin-

ated rather in an error in judgment than in wilful evil; and it went on to state, that the writer had suddenly become aware that it was possible to make atonement, and do away the evil done. It told me further, that such should be the case immediately. It referred to the circumstances in which we all now stand — to you, to Mr. Forrest, to the death of this young man; and there it left me, to roam through the wide world of conjecture, without any means whatsoever of guessing what the evil act committed had been, or what the atonement was to be.”

“If the purposes of Mr. Forrest are such as we suppose,” said Strafford, after thinking for a moment, “may this letter not be, my dear sir, some device to mislead us. By its speaking of all the circumstances in which we are at present engaged, would it not seem like something made up for the present occasion, rather than really referring to events which took place many years ago?”

“No, Strafford, no,” replied his uncle, in a grave and even melancholy tone. “There

were words in that letter, there were allusions therein, which brought up in a moment to my eyes the dear but painful memories of years long gone, scenes bright and beautiful, days happy and full of hope, closely connected with those pangs, bereavements, and disappointments which, notwithstanding every effort of a mind sincerely grateful to that God who has heaped my lot with blessings, have nevertheless cast a shadow upon my life, and produced feelings of gloom, which I trust and hope I have confined to my own bosom ; but they have nevertheless dwelt there as very painful and unwelcome guests. I remember, my dear boy, once suddenly seeing, in a collection, a picture of Claude de Lorraine, representing a scene in Italy, where I had passed many pleasant hours. The moment my eye fell upon the rich rocks and woods of the temple-crowned height, the waterfall, the long perspective of the blue distance, and the sunshiny splendour of the sky ; a thousand other things, that the painter had not painted, hills perhaps that his feet had never trod, the interior of the temple, the rocky seat beneath

the fall, the sweet villa and its gardens, that I had once inhabited, the cottages of the peasantry that I had visited and dwelt amongst, rose up before my eyes, and completed the picture, as if they had been called forth by magic ; and thus that letter, my dear Strafford, by a few brief touches and allusions to other days, drew suddenly back the veil of the past, and up before the eye of memory rose, as if by magic, the hopes, the visions, the delights of former years, mingled and enwrapt in the clouds and storms that dispersed them all for ever. No, Strafford, no ; that letter was written by some hand familiar with my own in the times past ; and if I had not myself closed the eyes of the only one whom I fully confided in and trusted at that time, I should think that the letter was from him."

" Do you know the hand-writing at all, my dear sir ?" demanded Strafford.

" I have some faint recollection of it," he replied, " but too faint to be any guide. However, the assurances contained in that letter leave me in a state of anxious expectation, agitation, and, must I say it ? hope — hope of, I

know not what, Strafford ; but hope with which you, my dear boy, are connected ; for the letter points evidently to you, and bids me not suffer you to sink into despondency, or give way to despair.”

“ But, my dear sir,” demanded Strafford, “ does it lay down any rule of action, or tell us in what way we are to behave to aid in the accomplishment of the promises given ? ”

“ None, my dear boy, or but very little, and the directions given most reasonable. Had there been directions given, or any thing demanded, I should have, of course, looked at the matter with great suspicion ; but the only thing, which I recollect at this moment, therein required, is to send off a messenger for Sir Arthur Brotherton, or some other acting magistrate for this county, in order to have upon the spot some person of perfect respectability, independence, and candour, to oppose to this personage Waters. Brotherton, you know, is absent in Northamptonshire ; but I sent off for him immediately, and doubt not that he will join us soon.”

“ This is all very singular, indeed,” replied Strafford; “ but however the matter may turn, I trust that to you at least, my dear uncle, it may produce some happiness. I remember your speaking to me once, many years ago, of one you had loved and lost; and I never forgot it, and never ceased to wish and to hope that, in some degree at least, I might be enabled to supply the place of her of whom death has bereaved you.”

“ And so you did, Strafford, and so you did, indeed,” replied Sir Andrew, with affectionate warmth; “ you were my comfort, and my consolation, and from your conduct as a boy, and your conduct as a man, have I derived the greatest solace that it was possible, under the circumstances, for me to receive. But now, Strafford, I will tell you how I am about to proceed, and then let me hear more of your plans; for although I can easily understand that a long and painful imprisonment is to be avoided by any means, yet the state in which you are now living is almost equally painful and anxious. I cannot think that, after the notice

which you have sent of your intention to appear to take your trial at the assizes, any attempt will now be made to arrest you; and I believe that you might come to Stalbrooke, and live there in decent retirement till the period arrives."

"No, my dear uncle, no," replied Strafford; "I should not be at ease, not alone for my own sake, but because I should feel every moment that I was laying you open to be insulted and annoyed by a low-minded and pitiful person like this Waters. From what I hear, he has sent over the whole country after me, and, depend upon it, his malice will not stop here. Where I am at present, I believe, he has not the slightest notion of, and I am now very comfortable there; good Castle Ball taking the whole management upon himself. Through him, too, I can get any thing that I want from you; and therefore, on every account, perhaps, I had better remain as I am at present till after the trial."

"Perhaps it is better," replied Sir Andrew; "but then, my dear boy, you must not show

yourself so openly, or else you run a risk of defeating your own object. For my own part, I am at present going on to see Lady Mallory, and to converse with her upon those subjects in regard to which she wrote to me. If possible, I shall see Edith also ; and, perhaps, Mr. Forrest, for I wish to arrive at some certainty with regard to his proceedings."

" See Edith, oh see Edith, sir!" replied Strafford, " she requires as much comfort and consolation as I do. But I do not see why you should visit Mr. Forrest at all. I fear, sir, that he may not behave well, — I fear that he may not treat you with that respect which is due to your character."

" Oh fear not, fear not, Strafford," replied his uncle. " Dignity, my dear Strafford, is not a thing that can be injured. It is one of the diamonds of the soul, on which the foulest breath can leave not a stain. I am too old and too calm to quarrel with Mr. Forrest ; and any thing insulting or wrong that he does or says, casts its shadow upon him, not me. But now, Strafford, get you gone. Here, it is past nine

of the clock, and you in this park, where any one may see you. I may find my way up, some of these afternoons, to visit you. But you shall hear from me every day, letting you know all that takes place."

Thus saying, Sir Andrew grasped his nephew's hand and left him, and Strafford took his way through the more woody part of the park to the point nearest to the chase.

His conversation with his uncle, mingled as it was of various matters, was far more beneficial to him than any direct effort of consolation could have been. It withdrew his thoughts from the painful subject which had chiefly occupied them: it suggested hopes, however vague; and it afforded motives for exertion and self-command, which were very powerful to a mind like his. Nevertheless, as he glided along through the less frequented lanes and woods, after having leapt the park wall in his progress to the chase, the memory of the bitter disappointment he had that morning suffered, of the grief that might be in store for him, of the cheerless future which every ascertained circum-

stance of his fate spread out before his eyes, made his heart sink low and feel desolate ; and the slow pondering step, the dark-furrowed brow, the pained and anxious eye, with which he returned towards his lonely abode, might have formed a sad and striking contrast, could any one have seen it, with the buoyant and eager look, and the light step of hope with which he had set out to meet Edith Forrest on that morning.

As he went he passed not far from the spot where Meakes, to use his own expression, had *marooned* himself; and as he passed near, he heard voices speaking ; but only hastened his pace a little to avoid observation. His step, however, seemed to have attracted attention, for the moment after, he heard a rustle in the bushes, a whistle like that of a wild curlew, and when he walked on without paying any attention to that either, his name was pronounced in a clear but low tone.

“ Do you want me, Meakes ? ” he demanded, turning in the direction from which the sound proceeded.

“ For a few minutes, sir, for a few minutes, if you will come round by the little path,” said the same voice ; and although Strafford would willingly have passed his time in indulging his own thoughts, gloomy as they were, he turned upon his steps, and descended into the dell, where Meakes had by this time ingeniously woven for himself a little hut, under one of the wide-spreading trees, by twisting thick leafy branches, cut off some firs and beeches, amongst the lower boughs of the tree which sheltered him.

CHAPTER II.

WHEN Ralph Strafford approached the place where Meakes had formed his hut, he found him no longer in company with his usual companions, the man Stoner and the boy.

The first object which attracted the young gentleman's eye as he approached, was the red shawl and gay dress of the girl we have so frequently mentioned, and who, now seated under the little penthouse of green boughs, which served the old soldier for a habitation, had certainly an exceedingly oriental look, and was altogether unlike any thing in the country and nation in which she dwelt. Meakes was standing beside her alone, and her eyes were bent down upon the ground seemingly in thought. It struck Strafford as he looked at her, that the dingy hue of her complexion was not so deep as when last he had seen her; and he was naturally led to ask himself, how her features

would appear with the colouring of a European.

Before he had satisfied himself, however, Meakes spoke, saying, "I beg your pardon for stopping you, captain, but I wanted to say a few words about this Mr. Forrest. This young woman here has been talking to me a good deal about him, and she knows more it seems than any one else here, though how she came to know it, I'm sure I can't tell."

Strafford had continued gazing at the girl, who sat still and calm in a graceful attitude under the boughs, and although she once raised her eyes towards Strafford's face, and withdrew them again as soon as she saw that his were fixed upon her, she did not seem at all discomposed. At length, however, the young gentleman replied, "I have no doubt, Meakes, that any knowledge she has obtained has not been by unlawful means, though in one sense of the word, certainly, she is a dealer in the black art."

Meakes's eye twinkled, and his lip curled with a smile as he looked towards the girl with an

encouraging glance, which might perhaps have been translated, "Your secret is out, there is no use trying to keep it any more."

The girl, however, started upon her feet in a moment, saying in a clear sweet voice, but without any of that foreign accent which had before disguised her speech, "Hush, don't say a word! If you do recognise me, do not tell me so; call me by no known name, for if you do, I shall not be able to play my part with truth, and I have yet much of that part to play. Do not suppose either, for a moment, that the knowledge I assume, or the power that I pretend to have, are affected. As long as I continue in this garb, be sure that I know more than any of you, — that I act under the directions of one, who will not prove at fault in the moment of need."

"That you know more than any of us," said Meakes, "I am very sure, for you can't take me in, my girl, and I know that what you've told me is true; and, captain, you may believe what she says too, every word of it, and do what she tells you likewise; for certainly, as to that Mr. Forrest, she knows more than any one."

“Now I think of it,” replied Captain Strafford, “I have something to tell you, Meakes, about Mr. Forrest. Do you remember, a night or two ago, you said to me, that you could almost have sworn, from the likeness, that the unhappy young man, whom it was my misfortune to be opposed to, was the son of a person of the name of Mason, whom you had known formerly?”

“Did you ever look at a water rat’s hole, sir?” said Meakes; “for if you did, you must have seen that there’s a way in and a way out, and sometimes another way into the bargain. Now you see, sir, that the Mr. Mason I was talking about, was a bit of a water-rat like; and if he hadn’t two holes, he might have two names to come and go upon. I don’t exactly say it is so, but I don’t think it unlikely at all.”

“Mr. Mason, did you say?” demanded the girl, fixing her full dark eyes upon Strafford.

“Yes, to be sure he did,” answered Meakes, “and I said so before him.”

“Yes,” answered the girl, “you said true; but you did not know that the Mr. Mason and

the Mr. Forrest were one. You said true too — at least I think it is true, but of that I am not so sure — that John Forrest, who is dead, was Mason's son and not his nephew."

"I feel sure that he was Mr. Forest's," answered Strafford; "I feel quite sure that it is so; or, if it is not, that it has been so asserted."

"But whether it is or not," answered the girl, "whether he be his son or his nephew, matters very little to any one, except in making him the greater villain."

"On that point you are mistaken," replied Strafford. "To me and to my happiness it makes all the difference. You, who seem to know so well all and every thing that concerns me — much better, indeed, than I could fancy you possibly could, — you, of all people, should know, and should feel, that the fact of his being the father and not the uncle of the young man who lies dead in the village there, places between me and happiness a barrier, which I can neither throw down nor overleap."

"I told you," replied the girl, "I told you three days ago, that there was a bitter pang

awaiting you, but that a happier time was coming. I told you, that when you did feel that pang, you ought to remember the words of her who had predicted it, and look forward to the better day that she had predicted also. You neither believed the one nor the other; but you have felt the pang, and now you scarcely hope for the happiness."

"If you would tell me on what my trust is to be based," replied Strafford, "I could give it more faith; but as it is, what should I trust to?"

"To my word," replied the girl; "I would not pledge it to you, if it were not true. But I will give you no explanations. Believe, if you like; do not believe, if you do not like — it makes no difference to your fate."

"Come, come, this is all nonsense," said Meakes. "You stand up and crow upon your perch like a cock pheasant. However, I should very much like to have a look at that same Mr. Forrest, to see and make myself sure that it is the man I mean."

"That indeed is needful," answered the

girl, "most needful, not only to see him and make yourself sure, but, if possible, to get him by some means to acknowledge that he is the man."

"Tell me now," cried Strafford, suddenly turning to the girl, and taking her by the hand; "tell me what is the object of all this. Perhaps, if you do, I can aid you, and give you information; but I cannot, of course, work in the dark."

The girl left her hand in his for a moment quite quietly, and then bent down her head, and kissed his hand gently, withdrawing her own. "Captain Strafford," she said in a calm but earnest and persuasive tone, "do you not know that you stand here speaking with two people who are bound to you and to your uncle by every tie of gratitude, and who love you both as much as ever inferiors yet loved superiors in this world? What we seek will tend, we believe, more than any thing else could tend, to make you happy; and in seeking it, we are entirely directed by one who has every right, from superior knowledge, to direct us.

Our immediate object is to prove certain facts, and to gain certain admissions from Mr. Forrest, which it is scarcely possible to do without inducing him to meet or write to the man who is now beside us. The next step that is to be taken beyond that I do not know and cannot guess myself; but the difficulty is to induce so cunning a man as he is, either to write a letter, acknowledging some facts with regard to times which he might wish to blot out from the memory of all men, or to come for the purpose of seeing a stranger, at a distance from any assistance, and to come alone, especially when he has been so ill as only just to have left his bed."

Strafford paused and thought, and the whole party kept silence for several moments, as if each were pondering the matter in his mind, and striving to find some means of overcoming the difficulty.

"No easy task, indeed," said Strafford; "indeed, I fear, quite impossible."

"Captain," said Meakes, "men call me a cunning fox; and it's very true too, that though I have the legs on both sides all of the same

length*, I can run along the side of a hill as well as any badger that ever was born, if you do but give me something to lay hold of. Now you see, captain, I may know something that you don't know, and you may know something that I don't know. As for her, I think that she has told us all that she will tell us — and a wise girl too! to be able to keep the commander-in-chief's secrets. However, if you will tell me all that you know about this business, perhaps I may find out some quiet way of bringing the matter about after all."

"I really know nothing at all that can tend to such a result, Meakes," replied Strafford. "Every thing that I know tends to the direct contrary. I know, beyond all doubt, that Mr. Forrest is already acquainted with your name."

"That's awkward," replied Meakes; "that

* Any readers less learned in natural history than Timothy Meakes, esq. may perhaps be ignorant that the animal, to which he was at that moment comparing himself, is reputed to have the legs on one side shorter than the other, for the purpose of running more easily along the sides of hills and high banks.

wo'n't make him the more likely to come, certainly. — But pray, how do you know, captain, that he is acquainted with my name? — Some of the sprees that we were in about those young days aren't what a man likes talked about after he's fifty; no, nor do they make him very loving to his former companions, when the hair grows grey and the heart cold. But are you quite sure, captain, that he knows my name?"

"Quite," answered Strafford. "He not only knows your name, but he has used every means to persecute you."

"Me?" exclaimed Meakes, lifting up his head, and looking as if he were going to charge with the bayonet; "Me? D—n him, what harm did I ever do him?"

"None," replied Strafford; "none that I know of. But the facts that I wished to tell you are these, Meakes, and probably you do not know them:—In the first place, you were originally apprehended — at least so I learn by a letter which Lady Mallory wrote to my uncle — at the instigation of that unhappy young man, Forrest's son or his nephew, who

induced Waters to grant a warrant against you, without Lady Mallory's knowledge or consent, in order to get you out of the way, while he was pursuing his infamous schemes against poor Lucy."

Meakes laid his finger on the side of his nose, closing up one eye and exclaiming, "Oh, oh! that was clever too!" The girl who stood beside them, clasped her two hands together and cast her eyes upon the ground, but remained silent, while Meakes went on, saying, "he was a cunninger fox than I thought, but we've run him to earth, however."

"Hush! hush!" exclaimed Strafford, becoming very pale, and turning away his head in anguish at such a speech. "Hush! hush! Meakes, for Heaven's sake do not use such expressions!"

"I beg your pardon, captain," replied the old soldier. "I did not mean to say any thing to hurt you. But you were going to say something more."

"Nothing," replied Strafford, "but that this old man is now, it seems, seeking vengeance

upon my head for his son's death. Waters, who is an old enemy of mine, as you well know, is helping him to the best of his power; and they both wish, as far as possible, to keep you out of the way, or drive you out of the country by fear of this prosecution for deer stealing, in order that the evidence in my favour at the trial, may be altogether defective."

"Nothing?" exclaimed Meakes, rubbing his hands eagerly to and fro. "Do you call that nothing, captain? why, I've got him as sure as if his head were through a wire noose not bigger than my finger! Why, I've hooked him, captain; I have him at the end of my line! He may flounder, — he may toss, — he may dart about as if he were mad, — I'll draw him out notwithstanding. I'll play him by the hour till I've half drowned him, and then I'll land him on the clear bank without even a net. He wants to keep me out of the way, does he? Then I'll tell him what, he shall find me in the way when he least expects it. But now I wonder how we can get a message sent to him. You don't know, captain, that Lady Mallory was kind

enough to send me word that she was sorry for what had happened; that she had given no orders about it; and that Mr. Waters should be told instantly to stop the prosecution. So you see I have all the cards in my hand, captain. I can do what I like. But I must keep out of the way for a while notwithstanding. I see it all as clear and as straight as a pike staff; but the only thing I do not see is, how to let him know I wish to see him. What do you say, little one? You who know so much more than your neighbours, do you see any way?"

"Yes!" replied the girl, "an easy one."

"Indeed!" exclaimed Meakes. "You are a chip of the old block I see, and would find your way through a rabbit *bury* as well as a ferret, or any other of your relations. But what is it? what is it, blackie?"

"Captain Strafford," said the girl, "I have a message to deliver to you from Lady Mallory. She wishes to see you, to hold some conversation with you this very evening; and through her you may send any message from him to the man Forrest."

“You have hit it daintily,” exclaimed Meakes; “but pray, captain, get me some assurance, under the lady’s own hand, that she drops the prosecution against me. Not that I doubt her word a bit. I am as sure of it as a bird in a cage; but to deal with this Mr. Forrest, I see very well that I must be quite free, and sure that nothing will interrupt me. You little one, run down directly to the person you know; tell that person to come here and speak with me. I must have the whole business pat, or I can do nothing. There is no use of trying to hold an eel by the tail; you must get him fast by the gills. What I mean is, I must have a good grasp of the business, do you see. No one need be under any fear of me: I shall never say a word to any body. I am not going to cry and scream like a peewit; no, no! I’ll walk as stealthily as a fox in cover, till the time comes for breaking.”

“But stay one minute,” said Strafford, seeing the girl turn to leave them; “you have not told me when and how I am to see Lady Mal-

lory. You know that, without foolish risk, I could not of course enter the hall."

"That is not needful," replied the girl. "If you are in the park at Mallory this evening, just in the first dusk, and remain there for half an hour near the lake, Lady Mallory will join you, and tell you her own pleasure."

"Do you know what it is she wishes?" demanded Strafford, fixing his eyes somewhat intently upon the girl's face.

"Yes," replied the other at once; "she thinks and fears that, from the conduct of the man Waters, you may suspect that she has taken part with her relations against you; and she wishes to explain it. But I must make haste, or I shall be too late."

Strafford suffered her to depart; but the next moment he took leave of Meakes, walked quickly after her, and as soon as he overtook her, said, — "You told me once, some days ago, that I should be happy. Do you say so still?"

The girl looked at him with a smile, and gently nodded her head. "You are beginning to give credit to me," she said.

“ More, now that I know you, than I did before,” he answered ; “ but tell me one thing more. You told me that I should wed one who would give me wealth as well as happiness. Now, if I wed her I love, I neither look for, nor hope for, wealth. Who, then, is the person you think I shall marry ? ”

“ Her you love, and none other, sir,” replied the girl.

Strafford would fain have mentioned the name of Lady Mallory, to be quite sure that the girl’s meaning and his own were the same ; but feelings of delicacy and regard towards that lady prevented him ; and though the person to whom he now spoke had seen and divined much of what was passing in the fair widow’s bosom, the reverence of woman for woman’s modesty made her also silent ; and, after pausing for a moment, Strafford left her, and turned his steps towards his solitary abode.

CHAPTER III.

EVERY one not amongst the absolutely and constantly depraved; not amongst the cold, insensible, and statue-like; and not amongst the good and holy few, whose actions and passions are alike under the constant rule of conscience, — every one, in short, of those mixed beings who feel as the apostle of the Gentiles felt, that there are two wills within us, one warring against the other, — must know, by having experienced how grand and ennobling is the sensation; how expansive and dignified is the feeling; how, from the elevation of the mind, the step gains a firmer tread; and how, from the purifying of the spirit, the heart respires with unfettered freedom, when, after one of the terrible struggles in the human breast between evil and good, we find that, by God's assistance, and his supporting and directing hand, we have trampled upon the serpent, and stand conquerors in the fight.

It was with such feelings that the beautiful being whom we have chosen to call in this book Isabella, Lady Mallory, rose from her bed upon the morning, the first events of which we have detailed in the last chapter. She had passed some part of that night in weeping and some of it in prayer; but the words, the evil words, of her cousin, had first roused her to resist her own passions as well as his persuasions; and though the battle had been long and terrible, the victory had been won—the triumph had been achieved. She was sad and grave, but she was no less proud of her success, no less prepared to carry on the war, till every evil thought or wish was crushed for ever.

Shortly after she had risen, she gazed forth from her windows upon the early morning scene of the beautiful park beneath. It matters not upon what object her eye lighted, but as she turned back again into her chamber, she exclaimed, “ Poor thing ! poor thing ! Would to God I could prove that the truth I told you were untruth ! I would unsay it now, poor Edith, with, oh, how much more happiness than

I then said it ! That cannot be ; but whatever Isabella Mallory can do to make you happy shall not be wanting."

She dressed herself slowly and thoughtfully, requiring the assistance of her maid less than usual, and consequently spending more time than was customary with her at her toilet. When she had done, the bell that summoned the household to breakfast was ringing. But Lady Mallory turned to the window again, and gazed out, conscious, perhaps, that the bell sounded like the knell of parting happiness to two beings who loved each other deeply. She remained there some minutes, and then descending to the breakfast-room, she satisfied herself that Mrs. Forrest was not down. Her next impulse was to go out upon the terrace ; and casting a veil over her head, she watched for a moment, till she saw a figure in white emerge from amongst the trees towards the east, and come on with a faint and wavering pace towards the house. Lady Mallory hesitated not ; all the better feelings of her heart were triumphant, and she advanced with

rapid steps to meet poor Edith, whose trembling steps had scarcely strength to carry her onward.

“ I have told him ! ” said Edith, in a low voice, as Lady Mallory gently drew her arm through her own, continuing to hold her hand for a moment after she had done so. “ I have seen him ! I have told him ; and we have parted for —— ”

“ Hush, dear Edith ! hush ! ” said Lady Mallory tenderly ; “ speak not of it just now, it will agitate you more than you are already. ”

“ And that is quite enough, ” replied Edith. “ I fear, Lady Mallory, ” she said, “ I must not show myself at breakfast, for my poor mother’s sake. She will see in a moment that something has occurred to ruin her child’s peace ; and that will crush the last spark of hope and happiness out of her heart. I may well say that my head aches, Lady Mallory ; for Heaven knows, were it the pain I feel in my temples alone, it were enough to distract me. ”

“ I can feel for you, Edith, ” said Lady Mallory ; “ deeply feel for you. There are many subjects on which I wish to speak with you,

dear Edith. I have been thinking over many things since you and I last spoke together; and when you are well enough to hear me, Edith, I will make you a sharer of all my most secret thoughts: — no, not perhaps all,” she added, with a slight blush; “not perhaps all, Edith: there may be things that I cannot speak even to you; but still we will have confidence in each other, and we shall thus find support and consolation in any affliction. We have known each other, Edith, but a very short time; but that strange thing, circumstance, which so continually makes and shapes our fate in life, has broken down between us all the barriers that might otherwise have existed; and I am sure, Edith, you will believe me when I declare, that if it were in my power at this moment, by any sacrifice of my own feelings, — in short, by any act in my power to do — to remove the grief that hangs upon you, and to make you as happy as, I believe, you deserve to be, I would do it without hesitation.”

“Oh, I know you are kind and generous,” answered Edith.

“Nay, do not let me take credit to myself,” replied Lady Mallory, “for I do not deserve it: I have been selfish, Edith, in my thoughts, in my wishes — ay, and in some of my acts — very selfish; but I hope and trust to be so no more.”

As she thus spoke, they approached the house; but Edith Forrest could hardly reply, though she strove to do so. The great struggle had taken place — what she had to do was done — the effort, for which she had called up all her remaining energies, was over — and now grief, disappointment, despair, did their usual work upon her corporeal frame; and she felt so utterly exhausted, so completely without either strength or energy of mind or body, that she was scarcely able, even with the assistance of Lady Mallory, to reach her own chamber. There Lady Mallory rang for assistance, and Edith Forrest was placed in bed, happy, comparatively, in the state of temporary forgetfulness into which she immediately sank. As far as possible Lady Mallory made light of Edith’s illness to her mother during breakfast, and before the

meal was concluded Sir Andrew Stalbrooke was announced.

Mrs. Forrest rose on his entrance, saying, that she would go and see her daughter; Sir Andrew, on his part, appreciating the right feelings which actuated her, only stopped her for a moment to inquire after her health, doing so gravely and briefly, but with the calm and kindly courtesy which always distinguished him.

When she was gone, he sat down by the side of Lady Mallory, and speaking as a father might to a daughter whom he had not seen for some time, inquired after her health also; commented upon her looks, and expressed his apprehensions that all the painful occurrences which had lately taken place might produce evil effects in her yet unconfirmed state of convalescence. Nor was all this done and said merely as an effort of courtesy, but, on the contrary, every word, every tone, every look, spoke that real interest and kindness were at the bottom of all, and pervading all. After conversing with her for some time in this strain, the conversation turned naturally to the circumstances in which

the whole party were placed towards each other.

“ You do not suppose, Lady Mallory,” said Sir Andrew, after having alluded to her letter ; “ you do not suppose that I could for a moment suspect that you, whom I have so long known, and for whom I have always had such an affectionate regard, would take any part in proceedings which could pain me, or injure one so dear to me as my nephew. I know the enmity of that person, Mr. Waters, of old, and am quite aware that he acted spontaneously in every thing that he has done, to give an evil aspect to the unfortunate occurrences which have taken place.”

“ I wrote to you, my dear Sir Andrew,” replied Lady Mallory, “ because I was myself horrified to find that my agent, by various acts done without my knowledge, should have not only put your nephew and my own good friend, Captain Strafford, in a situation of great discomfort, but should have also subjected him to the risk of long and painful imprisonment. The whole came upon me so suddenly, and shocked me so

much, that it seemed as if every one must think that I had some share in it; and I wrote to you in haste, both on that account, and to let you know immediately the manœuvres which had been resorted to to produce the apprehension of the man Meakes.”

“For the latter information, dear lady,” replied Sir Andrew, “I am most grateful, as it tends so strongly to prove the previous arrangement of the whole scheme against Lucy, as to establish my nephew’s full justification in the eyes of every honest and upright man, for attempting at all risks to bring such a villanous transaction to light, by seizing upon the perpetrator. I believe, however, that the information you have thus given may subject you to some little inconvenience; for I am very anxious that you should make a deposition of the facts, in case of Mr. Waters being inclined to retract what he said: but I must warn you, in the first place, that I shall feel bound to lay this conduct of Mr. Waters before the government, in order that he may be discharged from the commission of the peace.”

“He should never have been placed upon it,” replied Lady Mallory; “and the sooner he is discharged the better.”

“If such be your opinion,” replied Sir Andrew, “we will have your deposition taken down and signed as soon as our good friend Sir Arthur Brotherton arrives. I will not take it myself, for I may be considered as an interested party, anxious as I am to save poor Ralph any farther pain than he already endures; for Heaven knows that if he have throughout the whole business acted wrong in any degree, — which I cannot find in my heart to say that he has,— all that has occurred, and the bitter consequences, have inflicted sufficient punishment on him already.”

“Indeed, I fear so,” replied Lady Mallory, casting down her eyes. “He is well, I hope: have you seen him lately, Sir Andrew?” And as she spoke a slight blush fluttered up in her cheek, and passed away again rapidly; for though she could speak to Edith calmly and tranquilly of Ralph Strafford, and barely conceal her own feelings towards him, yet the very

idea of betraying herself in the slightest degree to Sir Andrew Stalbrooke by a word or look, called up such emotions as might well make him master of every secret of her heart.

Sir Andrew, perhaps, might see deeper than Lady Mallory imagined; for he was clear-sighted and observing, and there was a natural tenderness and delicacy in his own mind and feelings which gave him an insight into the sensations of all noble and affectionate bosoms. His heart, when in company with a woman, was like the famous mirror ring of the great French minister, and reflected for his eyes alone what was passing in the breasts of others, even when they seemed to be most carefully concealed from his sight; but he was far too feeling, too kind, too generous, ever to suffer the knowledge which he thus acquired to appear for a moment, except when circumstances required him to act upon it for the happiness of the persons themselves.

To Lady Mallory, then, he replied at once,—
“ I saw Strafford this morning, and I cannot say that he is well by any means. You know, I dare say, Lady Mallory, that he is obliged to lie in

concealment, in order to escape the long and painful imprisonment we have been talking of. You will understand, too, that even if it were not for that, he could not present himself here as long as Mr. Forrest is with you ; otherwise I am sure he would have been to see you before this time."

"I know it to be quite impossible," replied Lady Mallory, with all her calmness restored by the easy politeness of Sir Andrew's tone — for, as in this instance, there may often be deep feelings as the motive for actions or words, apparently the most common-place — "I know it to be quite impossible, Sir Andrew;" — and gaining strength as she went on, she added, — "yet I wished much to see him, both to tell him how grieved I am at what has occurred, and to speak with him on some matters in regard to which he asked my advice before this unfortunate business occurred ; I mean," she continued with a faint smile, "regarding poor Edith ; of his attachment to whom I know you are aware, Sir Andrew."

The Gentleman of the Old School was sur-

prised — surprised at Lady Mallory's calmness and firmness, but not deceived.

“He did, my dear Lady Mallory, make me acquainted with his attachment,” he replied; “and I confess that, though I have seen so little of this sweet girl, yet I feel such a conviction of her virtue, her kindness, her sweetness of disposition, and her generosity of mind — I use the word in the highest sense — that I think, could Ralph obtain her hand, he would secure to himself every prospect of earthly happiness.”

Sir Andrew *would* not say, as he had said to Strafford himself, that he had never seen any one so calculated as Edith to make him happy; for he constantly held, as it were, a balance in his mind, in which every word that he used was weighed in a moment against the feelings of those to whom they were addressed; and Sir Andrew, judging of duties differently from other people, would have reproached himself more severely for inflicting a pang upon an amiable heart by a rash and ill-considered expression, than he would for causing them some corporeal injury by an idle blow

struck at random. He never sacrificed truth to any thing; but he seldom found the means wanting to render it, even when painful, less painful, by the manner in which it was told.

“ I fear,” replied Lady Mallory, commenting upon the doubt into which he had seemed to throw the fact of Edith’s ultimate union with Strafford, “ I fear that what has occurred may prove a very serious obstacle.”

“ More serious than at first it seemed to me,” replied Sir Andrew; “ at least, so I learn from Ralph’s own account this morning. He seems to consider, from Edith’s own words, that their union is perfectly hopeless.”

He paused for a moment, apprehensive that what he had said might do harm, but ever reluctant to inflict a pang, or to take away a hope. It was only for a moment, however; for asking himself what was right to do, he added the next moment, — “ I shall grieve deeply, dear Lady Mallory, if Strafford’s fears should prove too true; for after the feelings, which he evidently entertains towards this young lady, have met with so painful a disappoint-

ment, I can never hope or expect that he will love again; and can neither hope, expect, or wish, that he should wed any one with the cold worldly feelings which so often form the only basis of such alliances."

Lady Mallory cast down her eyes, and remained silent for some moments. She then raised them again, with an attempt to smile, and said, that, too probably, neither man nor woman can love more than once.

"I believe," replied Sir Andrew, "that there are some people who can love, not only more than once, but often; but they are not people, Lady Mallory, who ever love very well. I believe, too, that many a person, — many a very young man and many a very young woman, capable of the utmost depth and strength of affection, can love — if it deserve that name — very tenderly and sweetly, before they ever love truly and deeply. But I do believe that when once a person has loved with strong, ardent, passionate, affection — with that attachment which sets obstacles and barriers at defiance, — I do believe that they can never love

again,—I believe that the heart's harvest is reaped, Lady Mallory, and the produce of the season is over. A Spanish writer," he continued, seeing that she was silent, "a Spanish writer has entitled one of his plays, 'Gustos y Disgustos son no Mas que Imaginacion;' but I fear he has failed to prove his position; and we shall find, that in sincere love, though imagination may plant the seed, yet the heart reaps a crop of feelings, over which imagination has no power."

"I do not know," said Lady Mallory, thoughtfully, "I do not know, Sir Andrew, but I am very sorry both for Strafford and for poor Edith, too; for she certainly loves him well and deeply."

"I am sorry, deeply sorry," replied Sir Andrew, "for any affectionate heart that loves and is unhappy; but tell me, Lady Mallory, cannot I see this young lady? for I am very strongly interested in her—more so than I could have believed in so short a time; and I long to see her, to give her comfort,—to give her consolation. Perhaps it is presumptuous to

think I could do so; but yet I must still presume so; for I cannot help flattering myself that she has some regard for me."

"I fear, Sir Andrew," replied Lady Malory, "that Edith is by no means well this morning. I was with her shortly before you arrived, but she was then very ill—certainly very ill—and in no state, I am afraid, to receive you. Grief and anxiety have quite overpowered her, and I almost feel grieved that Mistress Forrest herself has gone to see her. I fear it will do neither of them good."

"You make me but the more anxious," said Sir Andrew; "yet under such circumstances of course I must forbear. But pray, my dear lady, let me hear how she is. Whatever happens, I shall always remember her with deep affection and regard. There have been few periods of my life more painful altogether than the last few days; and yet while Edith was with me, she made the hours fly more pleasantly than during any time I have known for many years. When she left me, after being with me for some time, it seemed as if a sweet dream was over;

and yet there were a thousand things to be remembered, altogether different in her from the rest of the general world,—looks and words, and turns of thought unusual, but bright and happy.”

“She is, indeed, a winner of all hearts, I see,” replied Lady Mallory, with a sad smile, extending at the same time her hand to Sir Andrew, who had risen to depart. “In sincerity and truth, Sir Andrew,” she added gravely, “I wish that she might, by becoming your nephew’s bride, bring those same sunny dreams back to your home again for ever.”

Sir Andrew bent down his head and kissed her hand; but for a moment or two he said nothing; and when he did reply, it was merely to say, “I intended to have asked for an interview with Mr. Forrest; but, under the present circumstances, and with my mind turned towards other things, and somewhat agitated therewith, I will refrain; and will now leave you, my dear lady. I grieve sincerely, indeed, that just when you are convalescent, so melancholy a party, and such sad circumstances, should give more than due occupation to your thoughts.”

“ Could I feel towards Mr. Forrest as I feel towards some friends, Sir Andrew,” replied Lady Mallory, “ the act of showing kindness and performing a duty would be fully sufficiently sweet to me, to compensate for the pain of that duty itself and of all the unpleasant circumstances that it brings with it; but I avow that I cannot feel towards him as towards Edith and his wife; and that his presence, as well as his conduct, is a burthen to me. I have forgotten to ring for your carriage, Sir Andrew.”

“ I have none, dear lady,” he replied; “ I did not choose to visit a house of mourning in such a way as to attract any attention; I therefore rode to the lodge of the park, and left my horses there.”

Thus saying, he took leave of the lady of the mansion, and retired. As soon as he was gone, Lady Mallory hastened to the chamber of Edith, with whom she found Mistress Forrest, sitting deeply agitated and grieved with her daughter's situation. It was impossible now for Lady Mallory to conceal from the mother's

eyes that her daughter was ill, and seriously so. Her hands were burning; her face was flushed; her speech was already wandering and incoherent; and as the surgeon was hourly expected to attend Mr. Forrest, Lady Mallory directed him to be sent in the first place to Edith's chamber, where she waited herself till he arrived. It was not long indeed before he made his appearance; but his report was any thing but satisfactory. The young lady, he hoped, would recover speedily;—such was his answer to Lady Mallory's inquiries;—but that she was certainly suffering under a severe attack of fever, of what kind or character he could not at the moment tell. He prognosticated, however, that the attack having just commenced, Edith would be worse before night.

In this prediction he was fully justified by the event; ere nightfall arrived, Edith having lost all consciousness, and raving wildly of a thousand things connected with the subject of her affection and disappointment. Lady Mallory, as well as Edith's mother, remained with her during the greater part of the day, and the

surgeon was directed by the former to inform Mr. Forrest of his daughter's illness.

A painful smile crossed Mrs. Forrest's lip, however, as her hostess directed the surgeon to be careful how he mentioned the facts to Mr. Forrest: and well might she smile, for the only observation of her husband, on being told that his daughter was ill with a violent attack of fever, and unlikely to quit her bed for weeks, was a sharp exclamation of—"So much the better; she will be out of the way at least, and unable to give rein to her own folly."

All that was kind; all that was affectionate; and all that was attentive, were done on the part of Lady Mallory; and yet, as she sat by the bedside of Edith Forrest, and listened to all the wild and incoherent ramblings which broke from the poor girl from time to time, she had to endure that thing most difficult to endure upon the whole earth—reproaches from her own heart. Every thought that she had entertained, which Edith herself could have felt pained at, had she been able to see it; every plan that she had formed for depriving her of

the affection of him she loved, — all, in short, that had been evil in her thoughts, or feelings, or wishes, rose up to her mind at that moment, and made her time of watching by the invalid, melancholy in every sense.

As the evening approached, however, and the sun began to sink into the western sky, Lady Mallory recollected the message she had sent to Strafford, and the appointment she had made with him. When she had sent that message, and made that appointment, her feelings were, indeed, not the same as they had been three or four days before. They had been changed, they had been softened; but they had not entirely, as now, given way to better resolutions and purposes; and the same eyes, which then looked upon things as indifferent, just and expedient, now regarded them as dangerous or doubtful, and, having been once deceived, feared lest they should deceive themselves again.

“Is not this rash? Is not this wrong?” Lady Mallory asked herself, as she saw the shades of evening begin to fall. But she re-

flected the moment after that her purposes were now right, and that, having herself sought the interview, she ought not to break the appointment.

“ I will take my maid with me, at all events,” she thought, and she even rang the bell to summon her; but before she appeared, Lady Mallory remembered the peculiar situation in which Strafford stood, the danger of his being betrayed, and the difficulty of restraining the tongues of domestics by any injunction whatsoever. When the maid came at length — and she was one of those careless but important persons who never come any faster than they are obliged — Lady Mallory bade her fetch her hat and gloves; and, much to the wonder and dislike of the Abigail, who loved not the commencement of what she called bad habits, the lady of the mansion set out from it unattended, at the late hour of seven o’clock.

CHAPTER IV.

WE have heard of men — ay, and — though we scarcely believe it — of women also, who loved not music, and who scarcely knew the difference of one sweet note from another; and if such be the case, there may be people who do not know, who have never felt how the heart beats, how thrillingly, how eagerly, when we go forth to meet with those we love.

“ If there be such, they are to be pitied. But Lady Mallory was formed of different earth; and though, with the beating of her heart as she approached towards that part of the park where she expected to meet with Ralph Strafford, a dull, cold, hopeless pang shot across her bosom, yet she felt all the dear, the warm, the thrilling sensations of seeing again the one that she had loved only, and loved best, though she came to meet no love in return, and to talk perhaps of his love for another: even the hope-

lessness of her own situation, the firm resolve to do in all things what was right, to seek in no shape for his affection, to do nothing that could turn it from Edith Forrest, — every thing tended but to increase her emotion, and almost to overpower the strong determination with which she had come forth to act her part calmly, tranquilly, and well.

Strange to say, she was less able now, with right intentions and every good feeling on her side, to walk steadily towards her purpose, than when she had doubted, nay, in her own heart, condemned herself. The truth was, the truth is, that passion struggled with, ever agitates us more than passion indulged.

The idea too of meeting him there alone at that hour, which in the strong current of her former feelings would have seemed a mere nothing, now moved and alarmed her; and with such mingled sensations busy in her bosom, she trembled much as she went, and at length was obliged to support herself for several minutes against one of the trees.

As she thus paused, and when she thought

she had recovered in some degree her composure, she caught sight, in the deepening twilight, of a man's figure, slowly wending on in the direction of the lake. She knew it well; she doubted not a moment who it was, and yet she could scarcely advance.

“I am weak and foolish,” she said at length, angry at her own feelings; “I am neither doing evil, thinking evil, nor purposing evil;” and with a step as quick as it had formerly been slow, she forced herself on to meet the lover of Edith Forrest.

Whenever he heard her step he turned rapidly towards her, and holding out his hand, pressed hers warmly. Yet there was a something, the slightest possible shade, which either was really perceptible in his manner, or which Lady Mallory thought she perceived in it, that made her heart sink for a moment with a consciousness of its own burthen, and a fear that burthen should be perceived. But a moment reassured her, for Strafford was all kindness and gentleness, and friendly regard.

“How kind of you, dear Lady Mallory,” he

said, "to come out at this hour to see me! How can I ever thank you sufficiently?"

"More imprudent perhaps, than kind, Ralph," Lady Mallory replied, "especially as I have been ill, and the hour is indeed very late. Let us turn our steps towards the house, for it is growing dark, and I like to have a sight of my own windows. You see what a coward I am become."

"Not with me with you, Lady Mallory, surely," said Strafford.

"No, not exactly afraid," replied Lady Mallory, "but I do not wish to see you embroiled in my defence, Strafford. What I wished to speak to you upon, what I wished to say, was concerning this other unfortunate terrible business. It has only lately come to my knowledge that my agent Waters has made himself very busy in giving the worst complexion possible to a false and malicious charge against you, that he was present in person at the inquest, and that he had previously, for reasons which I have hinted in a note to your uncle, caused the apprehension of a person who might

have proved a material witness in the business. All this must seem very strange, but I assure you, Strafford — nay, need I assure you? — but nevertheless I do assure you, solemnly and earnestly, that I would rather have laid down my life than countenance such a thing for a moment.”

She spoke warmly, eagerly, and in spite of all she could do — in spite of native modesty, of strong resolutions, of much command over herself,—there was a portion of tenderness mingled with her tone, which the circumstances called forth, and which she was unable wholly to repress.

Oh, had she given way at that moment to all the tenderness that filled her heart, what words would she not have spoken? how bitterly would she not have wept? But she did restrain herself much and strongly; and while Strafford assured her that he never could dream of thinking her in any degree a sharer in the proceedings of Mr. Waters — assurances to which she paid no attention, for she believed them all without listening — she regained fully her

power over herself, and when he had finished went on.

“What I was saying just now, Strafford, was the first cause of my asking to see you; but I am now very very glad that you have come, for I wish to talk to you of Edith, whom I have learned to love too, Strafford, partly from the bright and noble qualities which shine out in the dark, painful situation in which she is placed, and partly, perhaps, from sympathy with her in her sorrows and anxieties.”

“Alas, dear Lady Mallory,” replied Strafford, “sorrows and anxieties, poor girl, she has indeed enough! and so have I; but where are they to end? I see no termination: the faint lamp of hope, now almost extinguished, serves not to guide me on a step farther into the dark cavern of the future. Oh, Lady Mallory, Edith has herself told me this day, that there is an impassable barrier to our union; and, if she feels as I feel, the bitterness of death were nothing to the bitterness of this despair.”

“I fear, Strafford, I almost fear,” replied Lady Mallory, “that she told you true; I fear

that the obstacle is one which cannot be removed. Would to heaven that I could remove it for you! I would remove it at once: I would indeed, Strafford, at any cost and by any means. But I see not how, I see no opening; and yet one thing I can assuredly tell you——”

She paused thoughtfully; for though it was a truth she was about to tell, it was one which left alive scarcely one of the bright fond hopes she had once cherished in her bosom—it was one but too well calculated to overthrow even the chance of Strafford, disappointed of his first affection, turning to her who loved him so deeply, and repaying her for her conduct towards Edith and himself by his hand. A lingering hope, a vestige of her former feelings and purposes, crossed her mind as she was about to speak words that were calculated to confirm his love for Edith, and render it unchangeable, and she paused; but the next moment she thought,—“I must teach myself to speak such things, let them cost me what they may;” and she added,—“Of one thing I can certainly assure you, Strafford, that although the obstacles be-

tween you and Edith may prove irremediable ; though she may never feel herself justified in giving you her hand, it will be given to none other, Strafford ; and the end of her being will see her heart your own. We women can feel such things !”

“ Ay, and men too !” replied Strafford. “ It is a poor and vulgar philosophy, dear Lady Mallory, which teaches that man cannot love as truly and permanently as woman. There may be fewer instances, but there are many to prove the fact. There are fewer, because the temptations to forget the first strong overpowering passion of our being are more frequent with men than with women. Other passions naturally try to unseat from the heart’s throne any dominant power which tramples them beneath its feet ; especially when its sway has been unhappy. The busy scenes which men pass through, give to those other passions, — ambition, avarice, the love of fame, and many others, — every opportunity of dethroning love, if love be in himself not strong and firm. The daily passing of manifold occurrences, — busi-

ness, pleasure, danger, strife, and all the many memories attached to them, — strive to efface, by the crossing of new lines, the impressions of early years; but the diamond can neither be scratched nor sullied; and if the heart be of a baser stone, it may, and will, lose the image that it bore: but if it be like that jewel, firm, and clear, and pure, it will retain unchanged that which has been once engraved upon it. I feel sure as that I live that the memory of Edith Forrest will never pass from my heart; that my love for her may go out with the flame of life, but never, never, till then. But tell me, dear lady," he continued, after a pause, "tell me — did Edith know that you were coming hither to-night? did she send me any message?"

"Alas, no, Strafford!" answered Lady Malory; "Edith, I grieve to say, is far from well in health of mind or body. She was not in a fit state for me to mention my intention, or even to speak of you, Strafford, though I have been with her almost the whole day."

"But, ill—ill—did you say, dear lady?" de-

manded Strafford eagerly; "oh tell me! — not seriously ill?"

"You have stronger frames than we have," answered Lady Mallory, "and know not how soon, how easily, affliction and disappointment overthrow the firmest and most resolute of us all. Edith, I grieve to say, is ill, Strafford, and for the time, seriously ill; but as her illness is solely springing from the mind, I trust that it will not be of long duration."

"Could I not see her?" cried Strafford; — "could I not comfort her? — could I not give her some consolation by the deep, deep, unchanging love which is in my heart towards her, dear Lady Mallory?"

"I fear not," replied the lady; "I fear that, on the contrary, the sight of you would agitate her to a dangerous degree — indeed, Strafford, you must not think of it. Her interview with you this morning, — the agony she felt at telling you the fatal impediments that had arisen, — the deep and bitter disappointment of her own affection, — the pain she saw that she inflicted on you — all this has caused

her illness ; and the only things that will cure it are perfect quiet, time, and repose — the grief will remain, but the body will habituate itself to support it.”

“ But only once ! only for a few minutes ! ” said Strafford.

“ Do you think, Strafford, that she could see you in her chamber without emotion ? ” demanded Lady Mallory.

“ No, ” he replied sorrowfully, “ oh no ! ”

“ And that emotion might kill her, ” added the lady.

“ Then it were most selfish in me, even to relieve my mind from what I now suffer, ” replied Strafford, “ to attempt to see her. But Lady Mallory, dear, dear, Lady Mallory, ” he continued, “ tell her whenever you have an opportunity, tell her how deeply, how truly, I do love her ; and oh, give her that inducement to struggle against her feelings, and to preserve her life, if not for me, at least for my sake. ”

It was dusk — it was nearly dark ; and Lady Mallory suffered the quiet tears to fill her beautiful eyes. She yielded no farther, how-

ever, and replied — after the pause of a moment or two to render herself sure of the firmness of her voice — “ She need not be told, Strafford, how you love her ; and I will do what I can to assuage your anguish also ; for I will contrive that every evening, about this hour, if you will be somewhere on this side of the park, you shall have information of how she is proceeding. I have some one that I can trust to send to you.”

“ Oh, cannot you sometimes come yourself ? ” demanded Strafford.

“ No,” she replied ; “ no, I think not ! Nothing but the impossibility of seeing you or speaking with you in any other manner, should have induced me to come hither now ; and I almost regretted the promise as soon as the words were out of my mouth. But I must not repeat it.”

“ Oh, but, dear Lady Mallory,” replied Strafford, “ you can tell me so much more than any common servant. Your society itself is a consolation to me ; but that of course I could not ask, were it not under these circumstances,

when I can get no just account of Edith's illness but from you."

Oh, our good resolutions! how they are shaken and plucked at by circumstances; how a single accidental word will sometimes bend them; how a tone, a look, will sometimes overthrow them altogether! Strafford's words made the heart of Lady Mallory thrill and her frame tremble; but she kept her determination firmly. "Have some consideration, oh have some consideration, Strafford," she said, "for me and for my situation. I must not trifle with the fair fame of my life, Strafford; and though I may consider you as a brother — a younger brother, — still others will not do so. To meet you here once in the dusk of the evening may, perhaps, be justified by circumstances, — I think it is; but were I to do so more than once, I should much blame myself, unless any of those absolute necessities which justify altogether our braving the world's opinion, and contemning the idle malice of the great mass of human beings, were to render that right which would now be wrong. You would not wish, I

know, Strafford, to give your friend pain, or to do her an injury, and therefore ——”

“ God forbid! God forbid!” cried Strafford. “ Say no more, dear Lady Mallory. I have been wrong, and selfish in this too. But so far let me be selfish a moment longer; take one turn back with me, and tell me how this illness affects my poor Edith. Let me know what she feels, what she suffers.”

Lady Mallory did as he asked her, taking her way back with him towards the dells, but by a path which was common and frequented from one of the lodges to the hall. As she went she told him all that she knew of the circumstances of Edith's illness, softening perhaps a little some of the worst symptoms, in order not to inflict more pain than necessary, but rendering her account, upon the whole, candid and true. That account, however, was quite sufficient to alarm and agitate Strafford very much; but Lady Mallory endeavoured, and endeavoured not without success, to calm him, and to turn his mind to other things. After having fully satisfied him, she would not speak more

of Edith ; and as he once more turned with her, she insisted upon his speaking of himself, — on his telling her his hopes, his plans, and his prospects, and what was the line of defence that he intended to adopt.

“ The simple truth,” replied Strafford, “ is all I have to tell ; that I was riding home after calling upon you ; that I heard the screams of a woman, and galloping up, found a young libertine, with the aid of two mercenary scoundrels, forcing poor Lucy Williams away from her home.”

“ Under the pretence of arresting her for debt, I understand,” replied Lady Mallory.

“ That I did not know,” answered Strafford ; “ but it only makes an aggravation of the crime, for the hour was as unlawful for that purpose as the pretence was false. However, after freeing her from them, my story goes, as you well know, that I found the man, Meakes, who though decidedly mad upon the subject of poaching, is in all other respects as good a creature as ever lived ; that he besought me to assist him in apprehending, on the spot, the

principal perpetrator of the outrage upon his niece; that I overtook the man, in time to prevent him from mounting his horse and riding away; that he drew his sword upon me, struck me, and forced me to defend myself, when he unfortunately came by his death from my hand. His infamous conduct can be proved, with ease, by Lucy, by Meakes, and the men who were with him; and though his servant may swear to what falsehood he likes, which I understand he has already done, depend upon it he will be easily led to contradict himself as to the circumstances; and it can be proved, also, that I never attempted to conceal the deed, or to quit the body, or to flee from the spot. For myself I entertain no fear at all, and am only anxious to escape the long imprisonment to which I should be subjected if I were now to surrender myself. Meakes, who is one of the principal witnesses, is already informed that you will not proceed against him in this business of the poaching: but whether it were so or not, he would, I am sure, appear at any risk to give evidence in my favour.

But now, that I remember it, let me tell you, that strange as it may seem, Meakes himself has given me a message for you."

"Indeed," said Lady Mallory, "I suppose referring to this deer-stealing business; but the truth is, Strafford, I never believed him guilty. All the statements were shown to me some time ago, and I did not find one word in them to prove that the man had really any share in taking the deer. But even if he had, I still say, Heaven forbid that I should persecute him."

"No, indeed," replied Strafford, "it refers not in the slightest degree to that affair, but to something that he has to do with Mr. Forrest, the particulars of which I am not aware of. It seems that he knew him in former days, — but by the way, I believe, I ought not to have mentioned that."

"Oh! it is quite safe with me," replied Lady Mallory: "I will say nothing of it to any one. But what is the message, Strafford?"

"It is this," replied Strafford,—"His humble

duty to you—I give his own words—and he would feel greatly obliged if you could get Mr. Forrest to come down to see him any where in the extent of the chase. Where I have seen him is in the immediate neighbourhood of the boundary between the Mallory estates and those of Stalbrooke. He says you may let Mr. Forrest know that he wants to see him, and has some information to give him.”

“Do you think he can be trusted, Strafford?” demanded Lady Mallory; “I know that my cousin Ferdinand is inclined to pursue you with the most vindictive malice; that he would give great sums, I believe, to remove any of the witnesses whose evidence might benefit you. Do you think that this man is not to be bribed?”

“As little as I am,” replied Strafford; “you may give his message safely, dear Lady Mallory. He is shrewd, clear-headed, honest, and warm-hearted, though in pursuit of his purpose he will make use of any strange device that may come into his head. He seems to attach very great importance indeed to this

interview with Mr. Forrest, and I should strongly be inclined to take every means of obtaining it for him."

"I do not know well how to do it," replied Lady Mallory, "for the very mention of the man's name, between me and my cousin, may bring on again painful and disagreeable discussions, which have already nearly ended in our total estrangement from each other. Hark!" she cried, "there is a horse's foot. I must leave you, Strafford, I must leave you."

"It is too near us, dear Lady Mallory," replied Strafford, in a low quick voice; "do not be agitated. Better that we should walk on together towards the house, at all risks to me, than that you should be seen suddenly parting from me on the approach of any one. Be calm, dear Lady Mallory."

"Oh yes! I am calm," she replied; "I am always calm when my resolution is taken."

They walked on slowly then towards the house, while the horse's feet gained upon them rapidly. As it was coming on the side of Lady

Mallory, Strafford calmly and deliberately placed her on the other side, and gave her his arm; but the horseman turned round to look as he passed, then drew up his beast and dismounted, and much to the mortification and annoyance of Lady Mallory, the portly figure and keen vulgar face of Mr. Waters presented itself, as he walked up with a simpering look of somewhat arch meaning, and made a low bow to the lady of the domain, bowing also to Strafford; who returned it haughtily, and continued in profound silence. Lady Mallory also raised her head with graceful haughtiness; but Mr. Waters was not either sufficiently of a gentleman by habit, or a man of feeling by nature, to know what to do under such circumstances, and he exclaimed,—

“ Dear me, Lady Mallory, I did not think to see your ladyship out at this time of night. I declare at first I thought it was some people poaching, and I rode this way on purpose to see; but then when I found it was a man and a woman — a gentleman and lady, I mean, — I

thought — but it's no matter what I thought either, — only I hope your ladyship is well."

"Quite well, sir," replied Lady Mallory, gravely; "but only busy in conversation of importance."

The tone she spoke in was so decided as not to admit of mistake, and Mr. Waters was hesitating, embarrassed as to how he should get away, and take his leave, when she suddenly seemed to recollect herself and said, "Yet stop a minute, Mr. Waters, you may as well inform me what is your business at the house; I suppose it refers to me."

"Oh no, my lady," replied Mr. Waters; "I was going to see poor Mr. Forrest, to tell him all about the arrangements for the funeral, and — and to tell him —"

"And to tell him what, Mr. Waters?" demanded Lady Mallory.

"That I have been obliged by your ladyship's orders," said Mr. Waters — forced to speak clearly, — "to take steps for putting an end to the prosecution against Meakes and his companions."

“I hope, Mr. Waters,” said Lady Mallory, “that the steps have actually been taken.”

“Oh yes, my lady,” replied Mr. Waters, “as I always wish to do particularly, I obeyed your orders immediately. I have a regular notice to Meakes in my pocket, that your ladyship desists from the prosecution, on consideration of his giving five shillings to the poor of the parish. After that you could not prosecute him even if you would, my lady.”

“Give me the paper, Mr. Waters,” replied Lady Mallory; “and you will be so good as to remember that Captain Strafford does not wish it to be known that he is in this part of the country; and that my agent having accidentally discovered that he is so, must not betray the fact to any one.”

“Oh dear no, Lady Mallory,” replied Mr. Waters; “you cannot suppose me capable of doing such a thing, knowing as I now do your ladyship’s wishes—and your feelings,” he added, with a little spice of malice, which Lady Mallory could not help feeling, and somewhat shrinking from. “Now that I know your lady-

ship's wishes and your feelings, I should not think for a moment of mentioning to any living soul that I have seen either you or Captain Strafford here."

But Lady Mallory, though galled, was too wise to allow him to have any secret of hers to keep, and she replied at once,—“ With regard to Captain Strafford, Mr. Waters, you will of course hold your tongue; for as I wished to speak with him on matters of importance, and found means to communicate to him that I did so, he has trusted himself here upon my word. As to me, should you find it necessary, you may mention to any body you please that I am out here walking with a gentleman. But don't mention Captain Strafford's name, that is all; and tell Mr. Forrest, if he wants to speak with me, that I shall take another turn, and then come home.”

“ Perhaps I had better not mention it at all, my lady,” replied Mr. Waters, puzzled and confounded by Lady Mallory's coolness; “ for I might be asked who was the gentleman, and then I should be puzzled what to say.”

“ True,” replied the lady, “ true ; perhaps you had better not.— Oh, this is the paper about Meakes,” she continued, looking at one the lawyer now handed her. “ But let me see, I had something else to say to you, I think, Mr. Waters.— You don’t go back by the Chase, I imagine.”

“ No, my lady,” replied Waters. “ But I could do so, if your ladyship liked it.”

“ It does not matter, it does not matter,” answered Lady Mallory ; “ I only thought you might have given this paper to Meakes yourself, for he is lying down there in the woods, I understand, close by the boundary between Mallory Chase and Stalbrooke. But never mind ; there will be somebody up at the hall from him to-night, I have no doubt, and I will send the paper down by them. Somebody will come up, I am sure ; for it seems he wants to see Mr. Forrest about something, I don’t know what. But I must tell the people at the house to let any one he sends up know that Mr. Forrest is too ill to go out.”

“ Had not I better let Mr. Forrest know

first, my lady?" demanded Waters. "Mr. Forrest talks of going out on Monday to the funeral."

"Oh! you may tell him if you like," replied Lady Mallory. "I should have told him myself, if I had seen him. But, however, I will send this paper; so good night, Mr. Waters;" and turning in another direction, Lady Mallory suffered Mr. Waters to mount his horse and proceed towards the house, saying to himself, as he did so, with considerable trepidation of heart, "I must take care what I am about! It's all settled between them, that's clear. The next thing I shall have to draw will be the marriage settlements. I am very glad I have found it out. I hope I hav'n't got into a scrape already. But I'll find means to be civil to him.—Bless my soul, he'll be worth a thousand such Forrests!—Bless my soul, what luck some men have!—Stalbrooke and Mallory too!—There will not be such a fortune in Europe.—But I'll go and explain matters to Sir Andrew to-morrow, and put him up to every thing about the business of this trial."

Lady Mallory walked on for about a hundred yards after Waters had left them, steadily and composedly; but she then paused and pressed her hand upon her heart, as if to stop its beatings.

“Do you forgive me, dear Lady Mallory,” said Strafford; “do you forgive me for keeping you here so long as to expose you to this pain and annoyance?”

“Oh it was not your fault, Strafford,” said Lady Mallory; “but this must justify me in your eyes, Strafford, I am sure, for not seeing you again in this manner, even to tell you how Edith is.”

“Fully, fully,” replied Strafford; “and I have only to thank you, dear Lady Mallory, for your very very great kindness in seeing me thus at all.”

“Well then, now I will leave you, Strafford,” said Lady Mallory, and she gave him her hand.

Strafford took it affectionately and respectfully, and gazed for a moment in her face, while the large round edge of the yellow moon,

just rising above the dark purple lines of the distant landscape, poured a pale light, as if of another and more spiritual world, upon the lovely features of her with whom he stood.

The countenance of Lady Mallory was very very sad; but it was full of noble thoughts, deep feelings, pure determinations; and when he had bidden her adieu, and turned his steps away, Strafford passed on, musing deeply, and with his heart filled with many sad misgivings for the happiness of one so bright, so beautiful, so amiable.

CHAPTER V.

ON the arrival of Waters at the house of Lady Mallory, he at once asked for Mr. Forrest ; and the servant, not knowing whether that gentleman had or had not retired to rest, left the lawyer in an empty room while he went to make inquiries. Waters had thus some time to think over what had just passed, in order to shape his conduct accordingly ; but the circumstances were new and difficult. He loved not to let a good and promising client, with a good and promising cause, do what he called, slip through his fingers ; and, with the shrewd cunning which the lower branches of his profession so frequently gives, he well knew that just in proportion that a client's passions are engaged, so is he likely to plunge himself into needless expense, and into acts that may bring on proceedings all profitable to the legal adviser. He thus felt perfectly sure of extracting a very

considerable sum from the proceedings of Mr. Forrest; but all this was, of course, a mere nothing, when compared with the actual agency of Lady Mallory; and as dust in the balance indeed, when compared with the prospective agency of the united estates of Mallory and Stalbrooke. These were the contending subjects of consideration, and he only thought how so to reconcile the three counteracting causes, as to keep Lady Mallory, not to leave Mr. Forrest, and yet to gain Ralph Strafford and Sir Andrew Stalbrooke.

A little hypocrisy, a good deal of impudence, falsehood unbounded, and pertinacity not to be rebuffed, will, almost always, in this good world, carry through for a certain time: and sometimes even to the end of life: the selfish purposes of an unblushing rogue; and as of all these qualities Mr. Waters knew himself to be competently possessed, he did what a more modest scoundrel would not have ventured to do, and fully resolved upon reconciling opposite and incompatible things.

His first design then, was to deal with Mr.

Forrest, with a view of persuading him that, even while engaged in an ostentatious manner in giving every aid and support to Ralph Strafford, he was still eager and zealous to gratify the former gentleman's revenge.

“ I must give him some proof that I am serving his interests,” thought Mr. Waters, “ even while I tell him that Lady Mallory compels me to act apparently against his wishes. — But that I can easily do. In the first place, there is this business of Meakes' to communicate to him ; and in the next place, while I am denying that I know any thing about this Captain Strafford's abode, so that he can't tell any body that I said I had seen him, I can give the old gentleman such a hint as will enable him to pounce upon him at once. The least hint will make him do it, I know ; and then let me have once my young gentleman tight in the prison at Lallington, and I'll work upon him, and coax him, and assist him, and advise him, till he thinks me the finest fellow that ever lived.”

Part of this soliloquy took place almost

aloud, while he was waiting for the servant's return; part was half muttered on the staircase, as he mounted towards Mr. Forrest's room; and the whole had so far passed from mere thought into the organs of enunciation, that the low half-spoken words were eked out with nods, and smiles, and shrugs of the fat shoulders, making the servant turn round and think the agent mad. The latter part, indeed, was restrained to the simple process of thinking, as he entered the room in which Mr. Forrest was sitting up in his chair.

Mr. Forrest's salutation was not of the most cordial kind; for he was one of those men who trample on all things that may be trampled upon.

"What brings you here, sir, at this time of night?" he said; "I certainly didn't expect you at this hour."

"I am delighted to see you so much better, my dear sir," replied Waters, smothering the question. "You are really quite revived; upon my word you look as well as ever."

"How do you know how I ever look, sir?" demanded Mr. Forrest. "I may usually be as

florid as a milkmaid, or an old London harridan in her bought complexion and borrowed diamonds, on a court birth-night, for aught you know to the contrary. However, I am better, stronger, more vigorous. And now, sir, to business."

"I did not come here, sir, till the last thing," said Mr. Waters; "because Lady Mallory had strictly commanded me — and I, as her agent, you know, must obey — had strictly commanded me, I say, to take measures for stopping the prosecution of Meakes, and for notifying to him that it was stopped. Till the last moment I was in hopes of hearing from you, as you thought you could persuade her to alter her mind."

"She is as obstinate as a mule," replied Forrest, adding a low-muttered curse. "But cannot you devise means of delaying this?"

"My dear sir, it is done," replied Mr. Waters; "I was forced to do it, because ——"

"Done, sir? done?" exclaimed Mr. Forrest; "done without consulting me? —"

"But, my dear sir, only hear me out, and you will not be so angry," replied the lawyer.

"I was forced to do it, because Lady Mallory

told me that if it were not done this night, I should not be her agent on Monday morning."

The lip of Mr. Forrest curled with a bitter sneer; for it is wonderful how contemptible our own vices are in our eyes, when we see them in other people. There were few passions more strong in his bosom than that small mean vice, the thirst of acquisition; and yet when Mr. Waters put forth, as the cause of what he had done, the fear of losing his chief source of wealth, Mr. Forrest laughed with a contemptuous and bitter scoff; but the lawyer continued unabashed.

"The evil done, sir," he said, "is not so great as you may imagine. I have something to tell you, which may produce the end you seek for, just as well as if the prosecution had gone on against Meakes. It may cost you a little more, but you will not mind that."

"I am not so sure of it, sir," replied Mr. Forrest, "why should I be called upon to pay largely for what might have been obtained for little? — But never mind; go on, tell me what is this information you have to give me."

“ Indeed, my dear sir,” said Waters, resolved to see what a little spirit would do upon the occasion, “ you do not seem to consider all the trouble that I have taken in arranging this business, and gaining for you information which you might not otherwise have obtained. What I have to tell you is, that I know where Meakes is to be found, that he has information to give you, and that he wishes to see you. Indeed, he sent a message to that effect; but that message would never have reached you, if it had not been for me, I can tell you.”

“ Indeed!” exclaimed Mr. Forrest, thoughtfully; “ know you what he wants with me? — Meakes — Meakes? Know you what he wants with me?”

“ Oh yes,” replied Mr. Waters, without the slightest hesitation in the world. “ He knows very well that you want him out of the way for a while, and of course he wishes to make his bargain; — a hundred pounds or so would n’t come amiss to Master Meakes, who has his expensive habits, I hear.”

“ Why not go to him to-night,” demanded

Forrest, "and see what he will take? Offer him any thing in reason, and let me hear to-morrow."

"Oh, it must be you yourself, my dear sir," replied Waters; "it would never do for me to go."

"And pray why not, sir?" demanded Mr. Forrest, fixing on him a sharp severe eye. "Why should I go, rather than you? Am I fit to go out into the cold night air?"

"Oh, no, my dear sir," replied Waters; "but Monday, or Tuesday, or any day, will do, when you are better. I could not go; because, in the first place, it would be quite unprofessional; and in the next place, it is you he wants to see. He would not open himself to me, a lawyer. But, above all, Lady Mallory has strictly forbidden me to take any ostensible or remarkable share in this business; and were she or any one else to hear that I had been dealing with Meakes to evade giving evidence, she would not only dismiss me from her agency, but have me struck off the roll of attorneys."

Mr. Forrest rose from off his seat and walked twice across the room; then sitting down again,

he fixed his eyes upon Waters, saying, "Am I to understand, sir, that you no longer intend to act as my solicitor in this business?"

"Oh, dear no, Mr. Forrest," replied Waters; "I did not say that. I shall be very happy indeed, on the contrary, to act as your solicitor in all professional matters, and nobody can say any thing against that. Then I shall be happy to do all those little extra things in the business which can be done *sub rosa*, and which I flatter myself there is not a man in England can do better than myself. But you see, in this instance, my dear sir, it is not a thing either professional or which I could very well be sure of concealing. Now all the business which I am undertaking to manage with the sheriff will never go farther; and if it did, no harm could be done; for suppose, when he's talking over the grand jury list, he were to say to me — Waters, here's farmer Miles, a man of substance in the hundred, a freeholder, and so forth, shall we prick him? — Then I can say to him — Why, he's a pig-headed fellow, Mr. Sheriff. Better have him on a grand jury than a petty jury, certainly;

for he would starve all his fellows out: but better have him on neither, I think. Then, if he were to say to me — Here is Castle Ball? — I might say — Bless me, sir, you would never have him on a jury, when he's going to be married to that girl Lucy Williams, and so forth. All *that* I can manage easily, Mr. Forrest; but for the other —”

“ I see, I see,” replied Mr. Forrest; “ the other I will undertake myself. I trust on Monday evening I shall be well enough to do it. But in the meantime let me know where this man Meakes is to be found.”

“ I know where he is at present,” replied Waters. “ But it is a question if he will remain there after he knows that the prosecution is stopped. However, your best way will be to make somebody show you the way up what is called the Plague-road, and the first house that you come to on the common is Meakes'. If you should not find him there, call for his little labouring boy, tell him to show you the way to the boundary between Mallory Chase and Stalbrooke, whereabouts Meakes now is. But

you had better let him know — for he's a cunning little dog — that it is his master wants to see you, for fear he should choose not to find him."

"I understand, I understand," replied Mr. Forrest; "though your account is not very clear, yet do not fear that I will find him."

"I think," replied Mr. Waters, "that somebody else might be found too, as well as Meakes, if one were to take great pains." And he looked with sly and grinning significance into Mr. Forrest's face.

"Who do you mean, sir? — who do you mean?" demanded the other eagerly.

"Why, if I must say who I mean," replied the lawyer, "I mean Captain Strafford."

Mr. Forrest gazed upon him with a dark inquiring look, but without speaking a word; and Waters went on: "You see, Mr. Forrest, that this is a business in which I must not take a single step myself; for although there are one or two things — aye, and something which happened this very night — that might make it not quite so agreeable for Lady Mallory as she

thinks, to dismiss me when she chooses,—yet you see her ladyship's feelings being very much interested in this business, I do not like, I do not choose, I cannot very well do any thing to hurt or to offend her. Yet if I were altogether a free agent——”

“ You seem to me, Mr. Waters,” said Forrest, with a malignant sneer at the bitter jest which he could not miss, “ you seem to me any thing but a free agent—the slave agent, I should say, of this fair and imperious dame.”

Mr. Waters never took offence, except with persons from whom he expected nothing. “ I am indeed, Mr. Forrest,” he said, “ as you say, her beautiful ladyship's most devoted slave and humble servant: but however that may be, of course I do not choose to offend her; but as I was saying, I think, if I were a free agent, I could have Captain Strafford in Lallington gaol before three days were over.”

“ Indeed!” said Mr. Forrest eagerly, and for the first time in his life perhaps repenting that he had said a bitter thing—but only repenting for fear his having done so should

throw some impediment in the way of his purposes. "Indeed, Mr. Waters! I would give not a little to see that done; for then a part of his punishment were sure. Oh, and to brand him as a felon and a murderer! That were a satisfaction indeed. But how, sir, how is this to be accomplished? How is he to be taken?"

"Ay, my dear sir, that is precisely what I must not say," replied Waters; "I must not tell you that directly——"

"On my soul! on my life!" interrupted Mr. Forrest vehemently, "not one word shall ever pass my lips. Tell me only how I ought to act — what I ought to do — all the responsibilities shall rest upon myself."

"Well, my dear sir, let me see if you are good at taking a hint," said Waters. "But remember that I must speak in ambiguous language; yet at the same time I am very sure of what I say. It is proved that Captain Strafford quitted his uncle's chaise without changing horses on the London road. It is pretty clear that he turned in this direction.

Now, Mr. Forrest, as it is likewise pretty clear to all of us, that there is a certain fair lady very much in love with him, and he with her naturally—for who could help it? All this being the case, I say it is not any unreasonable stretch of imagination to suppose that the lover would linger about her house. Now, putting the case that I—as you might do—wanted to cause the arrest of such a person, how should I act?—Why, as a matter of course, I would write a note to the coroner, telling him that I had good reason to believe—mind, Mr. Forrest, I don't tell you that I've ever seen Captain Strafford here—I would write a note to the coroner, telling him that I had good reason to believe that the person we speak of is lingering about such and such parts of the country, and begging him to take the necessary measures for his immediate apprehension. A felon, you know, can be apprehended by night as well as by day; and he is more likely to approach near houses, and all that, towards dusk—Do you understand me?"

“Perfectly,” answered Mr. Forrest, “perfectly, and it shall be done directly.”

“You know I have told you nothing, Mr. Forrest,” said Waters; “I have only said how I would act under certain circumstances.”

“Exactly, exactly,” answered Mr. Forrest; “and be you sure that I will take it all upon myself. Your conclusions are natural and just, even if you do not possess any other sources of information. So we will speak no more about it. The thing shall be instantly done. And now, Mr. Waters, if we have any thing more to say, let us say it quickly, for the doctor strongly advises rest and quiet, and of neither have I had very much lately.”

A few more matters of no particular interest were then discussed, and the lawyer took his leave. As soon as he was gone, and Mr. Forrest saw the door close upon him, he set his teeth hard, muttering to himself, “That is a scoundrel, and betrays me; but he shall find that I can do without him — ay, and punish him too, if I find him treacherous. I must see this man, this Meakes, myself — and yet ——”

But he left his sentence unfinished ; and walking up to a large looking-glass, gazed upon it in silence for a minute or two, holding up one of the lights to his own countenance. He ended by a dark and painful smile ; and then saying, “ No, no ! Not my own brother ! ” he set down the light, and rang for his servant.

“ I must sleep to-night,” he said, “ I must sleep to-night ; ” and then added, as soon as the man appeared, “ Bring me those opium pills ; give me two of them.”

“ But, sir,” said the servant, “ the surgeon — ”

“ Give me two of them, I say,” interrupted Mr. Forrest hastily, and taking them from the man, he swallowed them deliberately, and entering his bed-room retired to rest. The operation of the medicine was speedy ; and notwithstanding the irritation of his wounded frame and agitated mind, scarcely ten minutes had elapsed ere he was sound asleep.

It may be now necessary to pause for a moment, in order to describe the appearance of Mr. Forrest’s room at the moment of which we

speak. It was a large handsome bedchamber, fitted up in the most modern taste of that day, and with windows looking to the south and to the west. On the northern side was placed the large four-post bed, with its hangings of green and gold; and on the eastern side were two doors, the one communicating with the dressing-room, the other with the sitting-room we have mentioned. Through the dressing-room lay the way to the servant's room, and a bell at the bed head communicated therewith. A dressing-table, which was used by Mr. Forrest to save him the trouble of going into the dressing-room, was placed between two windows on the south side of the room; and on it now stood a night lamp and two large square inlaid cases, the one apparently a dressing-case, the other a writing-desk. The key was in the dressing-case, the writing-desk was closed.

Such was the appearance of the room after Mr. Forrest had gone to bed and the servant had retired; and its stillness remained undisturbed for an hour or two. At the end of that period, however, the effect of the opium began to wear

off, Mr. Forrest's sleep became disturbed, he tossed to and fro in bed, and at length, in a sort of half delirious state, opened his eyes and gazed out towards the dressing-table. He saw as he did so, or thought he saw, the figure of a woman standing by it. She was dressed in many-coloured clothing, with a handkerchief of bright red and yellow over her head; and a thrill of dismay spread through Mr. Forrest's bosom as he saw her, which for a moment made him shake in every limb.

“ 'Tis come again,” he said, “ the vision come again; but now, as last I saw her, in reality;” and impressed with the idea that it was but a delirious vision, he turned his eyes upon the pillow and tried to shut out the sight. As he lay, however, he became convinced that he was waking, not sleeping; and though somewhat stupified and bewildered with the opium, he could detect in himself no other feeling of delirium. He seemed in every respect perfectly conscious, perfectly reasonable; and he was asking himself, “ Can there really be any body there?” when a noise made with the keys, as it seemed to him,

caused him to start up and gaze in the direction of the dressing-table once more. The figure turned its face full upon him as he did so; and once more, with all the terrors of an evil conscience, Mr. Forrest sunk down appalled: there was a brief fiery struggle in his mind, however.

“This is a dream—a vision,” he said to himself rapidly; “or else some one is tampering with my private papers. In either case, I must conquer this weakness;” and springing forth from his bed, he turned towards the table. There was nobody there; the shadow, if shadow it had been, was gone, and the room was vacant of every other tenant but himself.

Not satisfied still, he approached the dressing-table, and though every thing seemed as he had left it, he was not content till he had removed from his dressing-case two small trays, and lifted up a covering which concealed the lower part of the dressing-case. He smiled well pleased as he did so; and taking out a small case of polished steel, with a lock almost as large as the case itself, which in fact, in shape and size,

resembled a small book, he gazed at it by the lamp-light for a moment or two, satisfied himself that it was still locked, and then replaced it in the dressing-case. The other trays were placed above it; and locking the case altogether, he turned once more to his bed.

“It must have been the effect of the opium,” he said: “I have heard that it produces such visions and idle fancies;” and turning to his pillow, he slept more soundly than before.

CHAPTER VI.

A FUNERAL in a country town is always a melancholy thing, much more so than in the midst of a great city, where the multitude of living, instead of offering, as might be supposed, a strange and startling contrast to the procession of the dead, seems to carry away all thought of mortality upon the tide of animation, and the only fitting and seasonable observation is, — “Lo! another drop of water, gone from the ocean.” Almost every circumstance is to man in general very little impressive, except by its associations; which are the channels whereby the events that occur to others apply themselves to our own hearts; and the general moral that, we all must die, is the only one suggested by the sight of death in a large city. But in a village, or hamlet, or small neighbourhood, a funeral has in general a thousand associating ties with the mind of every one who beholds it, bringing

it near both to feeling and generous, and to selfish hearts. One man, when he sees his companion borne to the grave, thinks of the boyish days of happiness which he has spent with him, and looks back upon the past with regret. Another mourns him, cut off early before his family are provided for, leaving a widow or parents behind. Another thinks — “ He was my schoolfellow, and he is gone ; it may be my turn next.” So each reads his comment in turn, — each feels an interest in the man he has personally known, — and gloom and darkness for a time take possession of every heart.

But different, very far different, from all such ordinary sensations were the feelings of the people of the little village of Stalbrooke on the funeral of John Forrest: his violent death, his abhorred character, the painful circumstances which had followed, affecting in a deep and terrible manner several persons universally beloved and admired — all gave a stern darkness to the brows of those who gazed upon the somewhat too pompous procession. There was no tear in any eye ; there was no sorrow in any

heart. Awe, and silence, and reverence, rather for death than for the dead, pervaded the villagers as the funeral passed on; and there was something in the aspect of all those around, which took any thing that might have been soft and natural from the feelings of Mr. Forrest, and he himself passed on tearless, amidst the unsympathising spectators, concentrating all emotions into the deep and fiery thirst of revenge.

On the preceding Sunday, Sir Andrew Stalbrooke had appeared as usual at the head of his household in the parish church, and it was remarked that he had appeared in black. The castle, also, was shut up on the day of the funeral, and the windows of one of the lodges, by which the procession passed, were carefully closed. The baronet himself would, indeed, willingly have attended, and thought over it for half an hour, two or three mornings before.

“There is no one but his uncle,” thought Sir Andrew, “who mourns his death so much as, or more than, I do. But this man would not understand such feelings, and would take

for an insult, that which was meant as a kindness. . I must abstain.”

He said nothing, therefore, and the funeral took place on the Monday morning, attended by Mr. Forrest himself—far more recovered than might have been expected—by Mr. Waters, the magistrate from Lallington, and a large train of dependents and domestics from Mallory. When the awful and painful ceremony was over—and awful and painful it must ever be—the carriages proceeded along a part of the road together, and then separated, one of them conveying Mr. Waters back to Lallington, the other proceeding as if to return to Mallory.

We will pass over, however, the proceedings of Mr. Forrest for about an hour,—those proceedings being directed to find out where our friend Meakes was to be met with, and at the same time to conceal, as far as possible, that he was thus employing the rest of a day, the morning of which had been dedicated to so painful a task.

Running on before him, however, we will seat ourselves by the side of Meakes, and watch the

approach of his visiter. The thoughts of the old soldier, though accustomed to death in all its forms, had been turned naturally, by what he had heard from the village, to the funeral of young Forrest, and he remained somewhat grave and thoughtful; not, indeed, in any concern for the dead, but from a feeling of sympathy towards Captain Strafford, whom he knew to be sitting in solitary gloom, thinking over the same event in the house of Castle Ball.

Not without some expectation that Mr. Forrest would visit him, Meakes had taken especial care that he should not be disappointed by not discovering the place of his abode. He had left orders with the boy at his own house to conduct any body up to the wood who might wish to speak with him, and had, at the same time, planted the man Stoner at the edge of the road, as a sort of sentry, to give notice of a visiter's approach.

It may be matter of some surprise, perhaps, that Meakes, who had neither any cause for further concealment, or any intention of hiding himself, should have thought fit to remain in

the wood long after it was necessary. He had his own reasons for that which he did, however; and, to say the truth, he was never very sorry to have an excuse for what he termed, taking to the bush: for old habits affected him still; and age, though it had given him the desire of possessing a house and a fixed domicile, had by no means added the wish to inhabit it. He had his dog with him, his gun, permission to amuse himself by taking game in any way he liked, and at the same time the pleasure of acting with some degree of concealment; so that he was in fact able to act amateur poacher to his heart's content.

At about half-past four in the evening, then, after having done a little business in his own particular way in the morning, as he was sitting teaching his dog a variety of different tricks, which perhaps nobody but himself ever imposed upon the canine race, the whistle of his sentry gave notice that some one was approaching. The dog instantly crouched at his master's feet; Meakes put off altogether the frank and playful bearing which he had assumed towards the

beast, and prepared to encounter in Mr. Forrest a beast of a far more dangerous and subtle character.

His suspicions in regard to who the visiter was likely to be, proved to be correct ; and a minute or two afterwards Mr. Forrest himself appeared, preceded by the boy from the old soldier's own house.

“ Here 's a gentleman come inquiring after you, Master Meakes,” said the boy ; “ and as he seemed quite a gentleman, I thought I might bring him up.”

Meakes stared in Mr. Forrest's face with a look of dull unconscious inquiry, which certainly was not very promising to a person burdened with such an errand as that of his visiter. But it was satisfactory to Mr. Forrest in one respect ; and turning to the boy, he said, “ That will do very well now, my boy, you may go.”

“ Stop a bit, stop a bit,” cried Meakes ; “ let us hear first what it is you want with me, sir. I may have something for the boy to do.”

“ Your name is Meakes, I suppose,” said Mr. Forrest.

“ I don’t mean to say it either is or is not,” answered Meakes; “ that ’s no matter, sir, here or there. I may be called Meakes in this county and Jones in the next. As to that, it’s all the same to me what people call me. I’m like a dustman’s dog, that will answer to any name. Pray, sir, what is yours?”

“ Of that I can satisfy you at once,” answered his visiter. “ My name is Forrest.”

“ Oh ! that will do then,” answered Meakes. “ Boy, you may go. I only like, you see, sir, to know what leg I’m standing upon; for as to the matter of that, I’ve been a good deal hunted up and down lately, and like a partridge, at the end of September, I take wing soon — wildish, sir, wildish — for one can’t trust every body in this world.”

“ No, certainly,” replied Forrest, “ that is out of the question. But I seek to do you no harm, my good friend ; and in fact I understood that you wished to see me yourself. I was told so distinctly.”

“ Ay,” answered Meakes, “ I said some-

thing about it, I believe; but it was nothing very particular, sir."

"But I hope," answered Mr. Forrest, "that you have not given me the trouble of coming here for nothing. I can assure you, that if I hadn't had to come to you, I should have been in bed at this moment, for I am very very far from well."

"Well, that was kind of you, however," answered Meakes; "but you see, sir, the thing is this, I've got nothing to talk to you about now. When I said to different people, that I longed to have a talk with you, I daily fancied that I was to be taken up and popped in prison, and prosecuted by Lady Mallory, and all that; and people told me that it was you set her on. But since that, I've had a notice given me that she has stopped the prosecution, and if that's the case, I don't want to speak to any body; for all I wanted with you, sir, was just to ask you to ask her to be quiet, and not to go on with the business at all, because I never had any thing to do with shooting the buck. Now

that's done, there's nothing more needful — thank you all the same, sir.”

There was something in the perfect unconsciousness which Meakes affected, and the simplicity which he assumed for the occasion, which both put Mr. Forrest at fault, and piqued him all the more vehemently to go on. He was himself, on all ordinary occasions, as cautious as Meakes could be. But the old soldier had no such enemies in his own breast as strong passions to contend with, and the citadel of Mr. Forrest's bosom was but too often betrayed by the garrison. In the present instance, however, he was determined to act shrewdly and circumspectly; and finding that the whole burden of opening the business which brought him was cast upon himself, he longed for a little more time, that he might speak of it, as if accidentally, and not give his communication in any degree the appearance of haste or impatience.

“I am very tired,” he said; “this unusual exertion has fatigued me immensely. Is there no place in the neighbourhood where I could repose myself, and get some refreshment?”

“There isn’t a tap within five miles,” answered Meakes; “but pray sit down here, sir. Under the hut you’ll find the bank as dry as a bone; and as for refreshment, I can give you a slice of bread, and perhaps a slice of a thing they call a hen turkey, and a horn of cold brandy and water. I could give it you hot in ten minutes. But I hav’n’t boiled my kettle since the morning, and cold is best too, it doesn’t hurt the liver. The brandy is as good as ever was drank — genuine Nantz, I assure you.”

Mr. Forrest profited by his offer, sat down under the bank; and Meakes applying himself to his own peculiar cupboards in the bushes, soon presented his guest with a slice of very good bread, the wing of a pheasant, and a large horn filled with brandy and water. As Mr. Forrest consumed his provisions, various questions and answers, all apparently indifferent, but not so in reality, passed between him and Meakes; and never, perhaps, was there a difficult game more skilfully played on both parts. Meakes was by this time perfectly aware of Mr. Forrest’s object in seeking him, and fully recol-

lected his person, though so greatly changed since they met twenty years before ; but yet he affected to have totally forgotten him, and to be perfectly unconscious of the object of his coming. Mr. Forrest, on the contrary, had no sooner seen the old soldier than he recollected him from various circumstances, and he was somewhat alarmed also lest Meakes should recollect him. At the same time he was burdened with a proposal of a very difficult and delicate nature to make, and he was therefore anxious to lead to it by any circuitous paths, while Meakes's cue was to force him to the most explicit explanation of his views and purposes, to drive him spontaneously to recall the circumstances of their former acquaintance, and avow himself as the person he had known under the name of Mason. The difficulty in accomplishing this was to lead him on to the matter by degrees, and yet to keep up that perfect appearance of ignorant unconsciousness which was absolutely required, in order to render the declarations and explanations full and satisfactory.

They thus sat then, not unlike two dogs snuff-

ing at each other's noses, and neither very sure whether the other will bite or play, till at length Mr. Forrest broached the subject of the death of him who had been buried that morning, and said boldly, "I think you were present when the unfortunate affair took place."

Meakes shook his head with solemn gravity. "Ay, sir, an unfortunate affair indeed," he said; "a fine young man he was, indeed, as ever I saw. We were great friends, he and I. Many a day's fishing have we had together, and we drew a badger together once. I remember it well, when he was down upon the circuit; and he said my dog Bess—poor Bess that's dead now—he said, she stuck to the badger like Sergeant Persiflage to a prevaricating witness. It was a terrible thing, indeed, that—a terrible thing, indeed!"

"Why, I thought," said Mr. Forrest, looking up with some surprise, "I thought that you were very much attached to Captain Strafford."

"Why, as to attached," answered Meakes, who was as great a master of the rigmarole as even Oliver Cromwell himself—"as to attached, you know, sir, that's as things may be. There's

no saying much about what one doesn't understand. As to Captain Strafford, sir, Captain Strafford's a gentleman. There's no denying it — Captain Strafford's a gentleman; and all gentlemen are fond of hares, and partridges, and rabbits, and more especially pheasants, and such like — and so am I for that matter; and you know, when two people like the same thing, whether it be a woman, sir, or a bird, there are apt to be disputes about it — not that I mean to say Captain Strafford's any thing but a gentleman. That's what I set out with saying, Captain Strafford's a gentleman, sir; and though he may be a little strict about game, when I go up to give my evidence, I'll tell all the truth about him, and the truth is, he couldn't help himself. He was obliged to do what he did do, — that's the plain truth, though the poor young man was a great friend of mine. He was your nephew, I think, sir, wasn't he?"

“Yes, he was,” replied Mr. Forrest, still proceeding cautiously; “but I thought you were the uncle of the girl, about whom this unfortunate dispute took place.”

“Why, as far as that goes,” answered Meakes, “you know, sir, an uncle can’t help himself. He is an uncle, let him do what he will; and I am sorry for the poor girl too, — though, to say the truth, her father and I were, what folks call, at daggers drawn. We have not seen each other for ten years or more, I dare say — no, not ten years either: it’s just six years, come the Wednesday after Christmas. That makes no difference, however; right’s right, and wrong’s wrong, you know, sir.”

“True,” answered Mr. Forrest deliberately, “true — it is so; but I wonder why, when your feelings are so contending, that you go up to give evidence at all.”

Mr. Forrest had now made his point without any very great abruptness or difficulty, though, it must be confessed, not without Meakes’s aid and assistance; for the worthy poacher saw, that unless he gave some facilities, the matter was likely to be drawn out to a great length. Meakes had now, however, his point to gain, and he answered, “Lord bless you, sir, they will make me go up; they all know well enough

that I had a good deal to do with the business, and they 'll have me up to a certainty."

"But are you a man to be made?" said Mr. Forrest, laying great stress upon the word *made*.

"Why, I'm not to be made," answered Meakes, "if I see any strong reason against a thing. They can't make me do what they like, like a black nigger slave. No, no, they can't do that."

"But what do you call a strong reason against doing a thing?" demanded Mr. Forrest. "Do you not think that in this case there might be strong reasons against your doing so?"

The game was now in Meakes's hand, and those who have seen the art with which a conjuror forces one of his spectators to take what card he pleases out of the pack, which he offers to them with apparent indifference, may have some idea of the look and manner with which Meakes put forward the various different motives, each of which might be considered by him as a just cause for not being made to do what the law required.

"Why, there may be many strong reasons,

“sir,” he said; “it’s all as the case may be. Now, supposing it were to hurt myself, they shouldn’t make me say what they liked — not they; or if it were to injure my fortune — for I would have you know, sir, that I’m a man of property: I’ve got my own land within a hundred miles of this place. Then, if they asked me to speak in favour of any one that I disliked, or had a hatred to, I could hold my tongue with the best of them, just as I saw a bull bitch, called ‘Whisker,’ keep her mouth shut upon the bull’s nose, though they cut off her four feet to make her let go. They should cut off my four feet and legs too, before they ever made me open my mouth to favour a man that I hated. Then, again, if my saying nothing could serve an old friend and comrade — that’s what I’d go through fire and water to do any time, and they shouldn’t make me speak if they took all the teeth out of my head to get my tongue loose. Why, I’ll tell you something that happened to me when I was in India. I had got on to be a sergeant, and I dare say might have got a pair of colours soon; but be-

cause I wouldn't say a word, when they wanted me, about Tom Whitcombe, who had been an old comrade of mine in the 38th, they put me down into the ranks again; and it only made me hold my tongue the more. Lord bless you, sir, I could tell you a thousand other reasons that would make me back and bite like an otter for that matter: but it doesn't signify; it's all as the case may be."

This reply threw Mr. Forrest into a fit of meditation for a minute or two; and to judge of the skill with which Meakes had proceeded, we must examine for a moment the impressions which he had produced. In the first place, he had taught Mr. Forrest to believe, not that he had any enmity to Captain Strafford, but that he was perfectly indifferent to him; that some old grudge about game had neutralised in his own case that young gentleman's general popularity in the neighbourhood. Had he affected enmity towards Captain Strafford, Mr. Forrest might have fixed upon that as an inducement not to give evidence in his favour; but by leaving the matter totally indifferent, Meakes

forced him to find some other motive. He had also, in regard to Lucy, done away with the idea that he could be actuated by any personal regard for her and enmity towards young Forrest, in the evidence he professed to give; and thus having cleared away all motives, and left himself perfectly free, he suggested, amongst the things and the only things which could induce him to refrain from giving evidence, those very circumstances of their former acquaintance, which he wished Mr. Forrest to bring forward, and afford him a distinct proof of. That motive, too, he had dexterously put forth in such a light, as to feel almost perfectly sure that his companion would seize upon it in preference to any other. All this manœuvring had seemed, as it really was, necessary to induce Mr. Forrest to recur to circumstances and times which Meakes justly believed he would rather keep in the back ground of his altered fortunes.

On his part, Mr. Forrest felt very great repugnance to claiming the comradeship with Meakes, which the other wished him to urge. Had he fancied, for one moment, that Meakes

would recognise him, it is probable that he would not have ventured there, but would have attempted to conduct the business through some inferior agent. He was led on from step to step, however; and, strange to say, the perfect unconsciousness of who or what he was, which Meakes affected, operated more than any thing else in making him careless regarding concealments. Had he found that he was suspected, he might have endeavoured to increase his disguise, as a man stands on the defensive, when he sees he is about to be attacked. Even as it was, he hesitated; and not quite liking to take the step fully and at once, he replied, after some thought, —

“ I think I could give you one or two motives for keeping a little out of the way, and not giving your evidence upon this trial.”

“ Ay, indeed, sir !” exclaimed Meakes, staring him full in the face, as if in some surprise; “ what may they be? For my own part, I don’t care one way or another. I shall give evidence, if they make me; if they don’t, I shan’t trouble my head about it.”

“ Why, in the first place,” said Mr. Forrest, “ it’s clear enough this Captain Strafford’s your enemy about the game.”

“ He was, I know,” said Meakes, looking at his companion with an inquiring and confiding air; “ but he is not so now, sir — is he ?”

“ Undoubtedly,” replied Mr. Forrest; “ I have opportunities of knowing it.”

“ Humph !” said Meakes, shutting his teeth very naturally, and remaining silent for a minute or two, during which Mr. Forrest did not speak either, in order to let what he had said have full effect.

“ It doesn’t signify,” continued Meakes at length; “ that shan’t stop me from telling the truth about him; I wo’n’t be pitiful.”

“ But you must consider also,” said Mr. Forrest, returning to the charge, — “ you must consider also, that here, a young gentleman, whom you liked and had a great regard for, has been killed by a person that is doing you all manner of injury; and that you forget your friend so far, as to go and help to get this man off, without any punishment whatever.”

“No, no!” answered Meakes, “not without any punishment whatever. If he weren’t likely to be hanged, I shouldn’t so much mind.”

“Oh, there is no chance of that,” said Mr. Forrest; “one of the counts in the indictment is to be manslaughter, for that very reason.”

“Ay, that does make a difference,” replied Meakes; and he fell into a fit of thought, which, to the eyes of Mr. Forrest, appeared that state of uncertainty, which one more cogent motive would at once determine in his favour. He therefore determined to strike the blow at once; and assuming a familiar tone, he said, —

“Come now, Meakes, I see you listen to reason; and I was sure you would, for I know more about you than you think. But to settle all matters at once, I will tell you what. If you will agree to set off from this place in three days’ time, and to take yourself, upon a little tour, out of the island till after this trial’s over, you shall have a hundred pounds for your travelling expenses, and you will, besides, lay the deepest obligation upon one of the oldest friends and comrades you have in the world.”

“And who may that be?” demanded Meakes, staring in his face with a look of the utmost stupidity that he could force into a pair of as shrewd grey eyes as ever were seen upon the earth. “I would do any thing in the world for an old comrade — money out of the question; but I don’t know any old comrade that cares two straws about this business.”

“You are mistaken though,” replied Mr. Forrest. “Do you remember by any chance, when you were with the army in Germany, a Lieutenant Mason, in a corps they called the Austrian Rangers?”

“Ay, that I do well,” answered Meakes; “I recollect him well, poor fellow, just as if I could see him before me now. He was a good bold fellow as ever lived — a desperate hand for a stag or a roebuck. I recollect him quite well. He was wildish — wildish, and not very rich; but he was a prince of a fellow. He and I have sat up many a night together. I remember shooting seven bucks with him one night by the light of the moon in the Bishop’s Thier-garten, as it was called, at Osnabruck, and we only got

one of them after all. Ay, he was drowned, poor fellow, in crossing the Elbe. I remember hearing the news very well, and we were all very sorry for him. Did you know him, sir?"

"Better than most people," answered Mr. Forrest; "for I who am speaking to you am no other than Ferdinand Mason, as I was then called."

"You! you!" exclaimed Meakes, starting upon his feet with the best affected astonishment that ever was enacted — "you, sir? There may be a little likeness; — but pooh, that's nonsense. Why, you are thirty years older than he was!"

"Twenty, Meakes, twenty," replied Mr. Forrest. "But so are you, Meakes, twenty years older than you were then, too; and though more like what you then were than I am to my former self, yet you are changed not a little also."

Meakes gazed at him earnestly for some time, and then said, in a low and considerate voice, "This is very strange! — There is a bit of a likeness certainly, and the voice is like too,

now I think of it; and you are about the same height, though, I should say, a trifle shorter: but that may be old age like. But if I thought that you were Ferdinand Mason, hang me if I know what I wouldn't do for you. But it's all nonsense! It's all nonsense! Why, you were drowned in the Elbe, I tell you."

"That I certainly was not," answered Mr. Forrest; "though I knew that such a report was spread at one time: but depend upon it that I am no other than that same Ferdinand Mason. I tell you so upon my honour, and I have no motive for deceiving you."

"Stop there, stop there!" cried Meakes. "Look you here, sir — I must be sharp. You see you tell me that you are the same, and you want me to do something that I'm not sure is quite right; but for an old comrade like Mason, though he was an officer like, and I was nothing but a corporal, I would do any thing, do you see. But I must be very sure what I'm about. You do look like him, now that I look at you nearer, — that you do; and you've got a trick of half shutting one eye as he had: but yet it wouldn't

do to be wrong, you know, sir : it wouldn't do to be wrong. And how can your name be Forrest, and his name Mason? Have you got a letter with you with the name of Mason upon it?"

"Not here," replied Mr. Forrest; "but I have at the Hall, and can show it to you to-morrow, if you like."

"Let me see that, let me see that," replied Meakes, "and I will be contented; and I declare, if you be Ferdinand Mason — Well, it don't matter for that: there's no use talking, — only show me the letter."

"But how and when can I do that?" demanded Mr. Forrest, now perfectly convinced that he had it in his power to remove the evidence of Meakes from the trial of Ralph Stratford.

"Why, I shall be here to-morrow," said Meakes; "for I shall lie out for a day or two, if it do not come rainy weather. I want to be a little more sure about Lady Mallory's business before I go into my house; so, if you like to come here, and tell me when you'll

come, that I may not be out of the way, we'll see about it. There is a likeness; there's a great likeness, certainly. But I should say you are not so tall as he was by a good inch."

"You may depend upon it," replied Mr. Forrest, "that I am the same person: if it were not so, let me ask you, how could I tell you all about him?"

"Oh, that might be too," answered Meakes. "People might have told you, you know. But if you can show me a letter, or get any body to swear that you are the same, I'll believe it; and then I don't much care what I do."

"It luckily happens," answered Forrest, "that I can show you two or three letters; but it might have happened otherwise. However, since such is the case that you wo'n't believe me on my word, I will come here to-morrow at three o'clock; and I can find my way by myself."

"Ay, sir, ay," replied Meakes. "Don't bring the boy, because you see if I am to get out of the way for a while, it's as well that people shouldn't know that you came up here more than once."

“ True,” answered Mr. Forrest, “ very true ; and now that this is settled, I will wish you good-by. But you will shake hands with me, Meakes ? ”

“ Oh, that I will ! ” cried Meakes, holding out his hand. “ ’Pon my soul, I do believe you are Ferdinand Mason after all. ”

And thus they parted, Meakes covering his eyes and laughing with a low suppressed laugh as soon as Mr. Forrest was gone, and Mr. Forrest proceeding in search of the carriage which he had left in the road, and saying to himself, “ I have made sure of him ! If this fellow, Waters, can but furnish me with even plausible proof that this Lucy Williams was the murderer’s mistress, the business will be safe. ”

CHAPTER VII.

As we have said, Sir Andrew Stalbrooke had caused the windows of his dwelling to be closed on the day of the funeral of John Forrest. He had, however, been led into a mistake in regard to the time at which the ceremony was to take place, by the fact of its having been changed the night before from a later hour to an earlier, in consequence of the improvement in Mr. Forrest's health.

It was not then, till the hour of four, that the worthy knight of Stalbrooke set out on horseback from his gloomy mansion, and rode over at a rate of progression very different from his usual stately and sober pace towards the house of Lady Mallory. The two grooms who followed him wondered at the rate at which he went, and mutually declared that it was more like going after the captain than after his uncle. The effect was, however, that he reached Lady Mallory's house very soon, and was admitted

to her drawing-room at once, although the house was of course shut up.

“What apology can I offer you, dear Lady Mallory,” said Sir Andrew, “for coming hither this day? The only excuses are that I knew Mr. Forrest was absent at the funeral,—that he might not be absent again for long,—that I wish anxiously to avoid any collision with him at the present moment from various circumstances, and that I must yet positively request your kind permission to visit poor Edith, and speak with her for a few minutes.”

“There is no apology needful to me, Sir Andrew,” said Lady Mallory. “To see you is always a pleasure to me: but not, perhaps, to see you so agitated, Sir Andrew. All this business has been really terrible, and has distressed you, I am afraid, a good deal.”

“I am agitated, dear lady,—I am much agitated, I confess,” replied Sir Andrew; “but this agitation is not exactly distress. I have a few words to say to Edith,—but a very few words,—and therefore I have taken the opportunity of Mr. Forrest’s absence: not, indeed, that

I should have scrupled to insist upon saying them even if he had been here, but because, as I said, I wish to avoid any collision with him for the time. How is Edith, Lady Mallory? I trust she is better than when last I was here."

"She is better now, thank God," replied Lady Mallory; "but she has been very ill indeed, Sir Andrew, since then; and I very much fear that any thing which would agitate her might do her harm."

"What I have to say," replied Sir Andrew, "can only tend to calm and tranquillise her, I am sure. It is for that cause, principally, that I wish to say it."

"Then, perhaps, it had better be said at once," replied Lady Mallory: "the state of delirium in which she has been for nearly two days has left her this morning; but the surgeon says, that it will not improbably return at night, though in a less degree, as she is decidedly better."

"Delirium!" exclaimed Sir Andrew, with a face full of alarm and concern. "Is it possible, dear lady, that they have driven the poor girl to such a state as that?"

“Grief and anxiety,” replied Lady Mallory with a deep sigh, — “grief and anxiety have, I believe, Sir Andrew, had that effect. It is not to be supposed that the body should long bear up under the fresh assaults of such sorrow and distress of mind as she has undergone. Mrs. Forrest herself, poor thing, is inured to endurance; but with Edith, agonies of heart are new. However, I will go to her room, Sir Andrew, and see if she be awake; and I am sure she may well look upon you as a father, who are a father to all that want kindness and assistance, and she may therefore give you admittance.”

“She may, indeed!” replied Sir Andrew; “she may, indeed!” and while Lady Mallory was gone, he continued thoughtfully walking up and down the room with his eyes bent upon the floor.

In a very few minutes Lady Mallory returned. “She is awake, Sir Andrew,” she said, “and will gladly see you. Mrs. Forrest, too, is in her own room; I will therefore show you the way.”

Sir Andrew followed in silence through the rest of the suite of apartments generally inhabited by Lady Mallory, till he came to the sick chamber of Edith, where the half closed windows and the drawn curtains showed how ill she had been accounted by those who attended her. With a noiseless foot Sir Andrew approached her bed-side, while Lady Mallory went to a distant window and gazed out through a part that was open.

Edith, always fair, and on whose cheek the glowing hue of health, though distinct, never exceeded that of the centre of a blush rose, was now quite pale; and heavy sickness still sat upon her beautiful eyelids, and weighed them languidly down. Sir Andrew gazed upon her with tenderness and anxiety, and then sitting down, took the fair small hand that lay upon the bed-clothes, saying, "How are you, my sweet young lady? I hope you are better."

A bright and grateful smile fluttered for a moment round Edith's lip, as she welcomed him.

"I am better," she said in a low voice; "I

am somewhat better, I am sure; though my head aches, and I feel somewhat faint. You are very kind to come to me, Sir Andrew. But how is he? I hope he bears up better than I have done."

"He is well, my dear young lady, as well as anxiety will let him be," replied Sir Andrew: "but perhaps he is of a more hopeful disposition than you are, Edith; and I must tell you, that he does still hope."

Edith shook her head and closed her eyes, and no one could suppose those signs to say any thing but "All hope is over."

"Nay, shake not your head so mournfully, Edith," said Sir Andrew; "I think there is some justification for his hope. You have hardly known me long enough, young lady, to be aware, that not for any consideration under heaven would I hold out one vain or illusory hope to any one; but such, I assure you, is the case, and therefore you may think what my opinion is, when I have told Strafford that I think there is hope, and when I tell you so too. Nay, again that mournful sign, Edith!" and he

put his lips down close to her ear, and whispered to her a few rapid words.

As if light and life had suddenly been given back to her, after utter deprivation thereof, Edith started partly up in bed.

“Hush!” he said, “hush! Not a word!” and gently urging her to lie down again, he continued, “It is true, or I would not say so. But do not agitate yourself, dear young lady; you see there is hope; but still there is much to be thought of and much to be done. Leave that to me. And now think of nothing but recovering your health and strength as soon as possible, and depend upon it that, as far as my efforts can succeed in rendering you perfectly happy, nothing shall be wanting.”

Edith drew his hand towards her and pressed it to her lips; and Sir Andrew, bending down his head, printed one kiss upon her pale forehead. He remained then for some time talking with her in a calm and quiet tone of voice, and the gentle self-possession, the hopeful cheerfulness of his whole words and look and manner, were well calculated to soothe the couch of sickness

or of sorrow. Edith said little if any thing; but twice she placed her hand before her eyes, and when she removed it, there were some sweet tears upon her cheeks.

After a time Sir Andrew raised his voice, and said something to Lady Mallory, and she coming nearer joined in the conversation. A few minutes after Mrs. Forrest entered the room, and seemed not a little surprised to find how her daughter's sick chamber was tenanted. There was no displeasure, however, in her surprise; and when Sir Andrew advanced towards her, greeting her with kind courtesy, she held out her hand to him, saying, "I have had no opportunity, Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, of thanking you, as I ought to have done, for the very great kindness with which you received and treated me at your house. Kindness, Sir Andrew, to a heart unused to kindness is doubly sweet; and believe me neither I nor Edith share in any of those feelings of animosity which others connected with us may feel towards you and yours."

"You do not, madam? you do not?" said a

deep voice, speaking as if just entering the door ; and turning round to her unspeakable dismay Mrs. Forrest beheld the face of her husband. Mr. Forrest calmly and quietly closed the door behind him, and walked up the room to the spot where the whole party were standing, bowing with supercilious bitterness to every one present.

“ This is, indeed,” he said, “ a very amusing and interesting scene. — Yes, young lady, you had better get up and witness it,” he continued, addressing Edith, who with habitual impulse raised herself upon her arm to throw herself between her mother and her father’s passions. “ You will seldom perhaps in life have an opportunity of seeing the uncle messenger of a murderer, already pronounced so by a verdict of his countrymen, visiting the affected sick chamber of the murdered man’s cousin, to carry to her love messages from the assassin ; while the young lady’s mother connives at the pleasant arrangement, and assures the antiquated Mercury that she does not participate in her husband’s indignation for the murder of his nephew.”

“ Oh hush, sir ! hush ! ” cried Edith holding up her hand, for it was to her that he addressed himself. But he instantly changed his tone, exclaiming in a loud harsh voice, “ Hush, base pitiful girl ? Hush, treacherous contemptible minion ? Why should I hush ? Do you expect me to be a soulless, feelingless, selfish, heartless thing like yourself ? ”

Lady Mallory rang the bell somewhat vehemently, and turned exclaiming, “ Mr. Forrest, I insist upon it that this may cease, at least here. ”

“ Insist, madam ! ” replied Mr. Forrest in the same tone ; “ I must beg leave to deny your right to insist upon any thing, in my daughter’s chamber, though in your house. I presume I may deal with my own child and my own wife, as I myself think fit, and nobody shall stop me. No one has a right to say a word against it. ”

“ Your pardon, sir, your pardon, ” said Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, stepping forward. “ Your own conscience, your own heart, I trust, will stop you ; but failing that, sir, there are many who may stop you. The laws of God, sir, give you no right to maltreat those whom God has

joined to you, or placed under your protection ; and the laws of man, sir, are sufficient, when properly understood, to protect those from *you*, whom you ought to protect from others."

" Sir Andrew Stalbrooke ! Sir Andrew Stalbrooke !" replied Mr. Forrest ; " let me have none of your hypocritical preaching, for I know you and your worthlessness — and you shall bitterly repent the day that you set your foot within this chamber. As for you, madam, as for you," he continued, turning to his wife, " the words which I overheard are sufficient for you. I shall take care that you shall rue in bitterness of heart and spirit your bold avowal of contempt and scorn for him whom you promised to love and to obey. Yes, you shall find that you have created a hell for yourself, from which you shall not easily escape."

Mrs. Forrest was as pale as death, and she trembled : but she looked at the pale countenance of her child, who was struggling to speak, but incapable from sickness and agitation ; and a sudden spirit, such as she had never before shown, seemed to seize upon her, while turning

upon Mr. Forrest with a flashing eye, she replied, "For one and twenty years, sir, I have endured that hell, and now I will endure it no longer. I will separate from you; I will live with you no more. Sought by you, and wedded by you, for your own interested views, you have punished me by a life of misery for entertaining the vain dream of a libertine's reformation. That life must now soon be drawing to a close, and its last hours shall not be spent with the man who has made so many unhappy."

"I rejoice, madam," said Mr. Forrest, "I rejoice that you have marked my murdered nephew's burial day with this wise determination. The interest of your rich wedding portion, some sixty pounds a year, I think, shall be assigned to you and duly paid. I heartily agree to the separation from you; but as my daughter's welfare and her happiness are not to be intrusted farther to one who has managed them already so well, bright Mistress Edith here shall remain to cheer me with her society. Ay, minion, ay, though the tears may run down your cheeks, hypocritical deceiver that you are

— you remain with me ; or go alone to share and witness your mother's beggary, and to make her morsel less."

Edith sunk back and covered her eyes, and Mrs. Forrest clasped her hands together with a look of despair, while Lady Mallory gave some quick and eager orders to a woman who now appeared at the summons of the bell.

Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, however, without taking any notice of the look of impotent rage with which Mr. Forrest was gazing upon him, turned to Mrs. Forrest, saying, —

“ Madam, I am witness that Mr. Forrest, your husband, has consented to the separation which you desire. The law is more lenient and equitable than he seems inclined to be ; and, though I trust his own good feelings, when he has recovered from the burst of passion into which he has been betrayed, will induce him to make such full and ample provision for you as his circumstances admit ; yet, should he fail so to do, the justice of the land will save him the trouble of making the arrangement by making it for him.”

“ Oh, sir !” exclaimed the faint voice of Edith, who had again raised herself and addressed Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, “ protect her, help her, and all will go right. She has never had any one to defend her but me, a weak girl. Help her, Sir Andrew ! help her !”

The rage of Mr. Forrest now exceeded all bounds. “ May heaven and hell confound and curse you, undutiful serpent !” he exclaimed, turning to Edith, and lifting up his clenched hands on high, while every fiend-like passion was distorting his countenance. “ May a parent’s curse wither and blast you, and pile hot coals upon your head till you sink into the grave, with his words ringing in your ears ; and hell, if there be such a place, receive you at the last !”

The words were uttered so rapidly that nobody could stop him ; but Sir Andrew turned hastily towards Edith, exclaiming, “ Fear not, Edith, fear not, sweet child. I will protect your mother and you too. Mrs. Forrest, after what has passed this day, it is impossible for you to dwell under the same roof with this

person. The house of my late sister, some twenty miles hence, is always kept up with the same establishment which she left. It is at your service, and I will beseech my dear friend, Lady Mallory, here to make all the necessary arrangements for your comfort."

"Pray, madam, accept it! Pray, accept it!" exclaimed Mr. Forrest, once more returning from the violent to the sarcastic. "Your wintry gallant will be in despair if you refuse his offer. Upon my honour, if the loves of the autumns were not too absurd, I think I might obtain the satisfaction of a divorce, instead of a separation."

He was going on, but did not get any further before Lady Mallory interrupted him.

"There will be no need, Sir Andrew," she said aloud, "for Mrs. Forrest to make any immediate change of abode. My cousin's conduct under my roof is an insult to me, which will of course prevent him from granting, and me from receiving, the honour of his company in my poor dwelling. With the society of Mrs. Forrest and Edith I shall be delighted,

as long as they will remain with me; but I am sorry to say, that the sooner Mr. Forrest —— ”

“ Madam, you may spare the end of the sentence,” said Mr. Forrest: “ Edith goes with me when I go ! ”

“ She is not well enough to do so, sir,” replied Lady Mallory in a decided tone; “ and you do not stay of course when your stay is not desired. But I will have no more fury, sneers, or altercation, in this room, Mr. Forrest. You shall not kill your child in my presence with my will. You quit the room directly, sir, without another word, or my servants, who are now at the door, remove you.”

“ Oh! if your Ladyship be inclined to use your feudal rights with such vehemence,” replied Mr. Forrest, bending low, “ I have no means of resisting all the hosts of Mallory, and must of course retreat, leaving this fair lady and her veteran gallant to make their arrangements as they please, and the fair and prudent Lady Mallory to —— ”

“ To do what, sir?” demanded Lady Mallory, fixing her eyes sternly upon him.

It had been an allusion to Ralph Strafford that hung upon the lips of Mr. Forrest; but he knew that he was in Lady Mallory's power, and even at that moment of excited passion, fear came in aid of prudence, and he stopped, not choosing to exasperate his cousin beyond a certain point. "And the fair and prudent Lady Mallory," he repeated, "to encourage an undutiful child in disobedience to her father."

Thus saying, he slowly quitted the room, Sir Andrew Stalbrooke following. Lady Mallory paused but for one moment to beg Mrs. Forrest to stay with her daughter and ring again for the women. She then hastened after the steps of Sir Andrew; but Mr. Forrest had seized the moment to say, in a low tone, "You shall hear from me farther, sir. Such insults do not pass unchastised."

"Pshaw!" said Sir Andrew, turning away with a look of contempt that he could not suppress. "Dear Lady Mallory, I have a word or two to speak with you."

"And I, madam," joined in Mr. Forrest, "must crave that you would give me board

and lodging for six and thirty hours longer. To-day is already wasted, and the space of to-morrow will scarcely be too long to wind up all these unfortunate affairs connected with my poor nephew's death. Should you be disposed to get rid of me sooner, however, and your hospitality prove scanty at the hour of need, there is a public-house at the village of Stalbrooke, not very comfortable for a man in ill health, indeed, but still endurable."

"I grieve, Mr. Forrest," replied Lady Mal-lory, "that your conduct this day should compel me to make any condition with my cousin, in regard to his staying whatsoever length of time in my house he pleases. It must be ascertained between us that, during your stay here, you do not cross from your own wing of the house to that where your daughter now lies ill."

"Madam," replied Mr. Forrest, "I have no intention whatsoever of quitting the apartments you have been pleased to assign to me. As to Mrs. Forrest, the matter is at an end, thank God! between us for ever; and the incubus of twenty years is now off my shoulders. In

regard to my daughter, too, though I shall certainly exercise my right of claiming the superintendence of her conduct altogether as soon as she is well ; yet till she be well I have no great desire to visit her, for my temper is not well calculated to bear with her insolence, and my object is not to retard her recovery. I shall therefore wish you good morning now, and only see you probably to take leave of you before my departure."

Lady Mallory bowed her head with stately coldness, and Mr. Forrest, with a curling lip and a frowning brow, pursued his way to his own apartments.

When there, and the door of his sitting-room shut, he gave way to a vehement burst of passion, stamping his foot upon the ground, clenching his hands together, and venting all the curses of impotent rage.

"But I will be revenged," he cried ; "I will be revenged upon them all ! Oh, if there had but been wanting any motive to make me pursue my vengeance upon this murderous scoundrel, I should now have it ; but pursue

it I will, and succeed I will, if it costs me half my fortune. Surely every thing in this world can be done for money! This man, Meakes, I will offer him any sum if I see that he hesitate, — and the girl, Lucy, how to deal with her. I can do nothing without that villain Waters, I fear; but he said he could prove it against her, — I must bribe him highly, — he would sell his soul for a moidore, — I must bribe him highly. These two removed, the facts, with the evidence of the servant, must be complete, especially if the jury be well arranged. And then, oh, if I do but hear the sound of guilty, that will be joy indeed! Then I shall be revenged on all of them! — For yon vain old fawning courtier to see his nephew condemned and executed like a common felon! for that base puny girl, and for the passionate dame, with her hot blood and her cold heart, who has stood in my way all her life, to see their lover die the death of a dog! — They shall have cause to remember me; and though I cannot bring the poor boy to life again, yet there shall be ample vengeance on all who hated him!”

As may be easily supposed, the strong excitement under which Mr. Forrest was labouring did not at all tend to restore him permanently to health; and during the whole of that evening he was heated and feverish, far more than he had been during the two or three preceding days. That very excitement, however, though permanently injurious, gave him for the time strength and vigour; and though the blood in his veins felt like molten fire, and the sense of pulsation in his half-healed wounds, made his whole frame shake, he laboured hard and sat up long, writing and making notes.

In the mean while Sir Andrew Stalbrooke remained with Lady Mallory for about an hour. The first part of that time was occupied in considering the best means of insuring Mrs. Forrest's comfort; but Lady Mallory remarked, that Sir Andrew said nothing whatsoever in regard to protecting Edith from her father's tyranny, even though she led towards that topic more than once. He expressed, indeed, great anxiety about her health, and great apprehensions that the conduct of Mr. Forrest should

have produced evil results; and at length, before he went, he besought Lady Mallory to go and see Edith, and bring him a report of the state in which she was. Lady Mallory immediately did so, and remained absent for some little time.

“ I can give no very favourable account, Sir Andrew,” she said; “ the poor girl is certainly far from well, and of course the terrible scene of this morning has thrown her back. She had fainted, it seems, at the time we left the room; and though she is somewhat better now, yet I fear very much for this night. I am myself, as you must see, Sir Andrew, very much exhausted and overpowered by anxiety and agitation of many kinds, so that I must have some repose. But poor Mrs. Forrest is quite unequal to the task of nursing her daughter; and yet Edith must not be left through the whole night to the care of servants. I shall therefore lie down very soon, to take a few hours’ rest. I shall have had enough sleep by eleven, and can rise to take my watch by the poor girl through the night.”

Sir Andrew pressed her hand affectionately :
“ You are a sweet and noble creature,” he said.

“ Oh no, no, no, Sir Andrew,” replied Lady Mallory ; “ I am nothing but a very weak, and not a very happy woman.”

“ Would that all were like you,” he said in reply ; “ and if you are not happy, Lady Mallory, I cannot but feel sure that Heaven will not leave a heart like yours in sorrow, or conduct like yours unrecompensed.”

“ Indeed, my dear friend,” replied Lady Mallory, “ if I be not perfectly happy — and who in this life is? — Heaven has been much more bountiful to me than I deserve. Of all mortal beings none can see within our bosoms but ourselves ; and we, however conscious of those faults and failings which make God’s goodness to us almost miraculous even in our own eyes, can of course see but a very small part of all that is wrong, and omit thousands of offences glaring to the eye, and calling aloud for punishment. Heaven forbid, my dear Sir Andrew, that I should claim any right to happiness, or feel aught but

deeply grateful for the portion that is allotted to me !”

“ God deals with us all in mercy, Lady Mallory,” replied Sir Andrew; “ but you judge yourself harshly, I know and feel, and your conduct to this poor girl must draw a blessing on your head.”

Lady Mallory thought that if Sir Andrew knew all that she had had to struggle with, and how far she had yielded before she gained the final conquest over herself, he might think differently of her conduct towards Edith. But on that subject she could of course say nothing, and with a few more kind words they separated.

According to the course she had laid down for herself, Lady Mallory retired to take some rest almost immediately after Sir Andrew had left her. Before she did so, however, as Edith was now tolerably calm, she persuaded Mrs. Forrest to follow her example ; but she left her own maid with the invalid, with orders on no account to leave her for a moment. The maid felt the task somewhat irksome, but she obeyed her mistress in a certain degree ; and though she

varied her occupations by going from the young lady's chamber into the dressing-room, by reading scraps out of different books that lay about, and by examining every article of Edith's wardrobe, she did not even *think* of absolutely quitting the apartment till the bell rang for the servants' supper.

For several hours Edith remained tolerably quiet and perfectly silent; from time to time, indeed, tossing on her couch with feverish heat, but uttering no complaint, and only asking for something to allay her thirst. Towards nine o'clock, however, as the medical man had predicted, the delirium began to return, and for about half an hour she talked a great deal in a rambling and incoherent manner, of her father and Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, and Lady Mallory; and seemed to fancy that the scene which she witnessed in the morning was still 'going on in her room.

Before ten o'clock Edith sunk, as it seemed, into slumber, and the maid, when she perceived that such was the case, was seized with a longing for a little relaxation. Almost at the same

time with the desire, as usual, came a temptation to gratify it, for the door quietly opened, and the still-room maid, as she was called, appeared with the housekeeper's compliments to Mistress Margaret, and couldn't she come down just for a minute to supper, for there was such a nice dish of sweetbread in the housekeeper's room.

“ Tell her I'll just come down in a minute,” said the maid, “ but I can't stay when I do come.”

Thus saying she walked on tiptoes to the side of Edith's bed, saw that she was in reality sleeping, and then stole out of the room, leaving the door ajar behind her, and persuading herself that she should hear if the young lady wanted any thing, though the housekeeper's room was quite at the other end of the large building.

CHAPTER VIII.

THE illness of Edith, and the reports that he heard thereof from Lady Mallory, had of course greatly added to the pain and anxiety of Ralph Strafford; and although a little note from his uncle on the Sunday morning, and another on the evening of the same day, had fanned up again the flame of hope in his bosom — the more strongly, inasmuch as he knew that Sir Andrew was truth itself, and on no account or consideration whatsoever would even insinuate a thing that he was not perfectly sure of — yet his state of uncertainty with regard to Edith, and that longing anxiousness, which we feel to be present with those that we love in sickness, to watch their every look, and mark every turn of their ailment, wore and distressed him even more than the care and grief he had previously suffered.

Each night, as soon as the sun had set, he

bent his steps towards Mallory Park, and there, hanging about the woods, or wandering through the slopes of the ground, he would watch the windows, and torment his own heart by manifold unsatisfactory imaginings.

Throughout the whole of the day of the funeral, however, he had been of course more than ordinarily gloomy and desponding; shut up in his solitary chamber, he had thought of all that was taking place without, as consequences of the deed he himself had done. He pictured to himself the agony of Mr. Forrest, who, he had learned, was to attend the funeral — his bitter grief for one on whom he had so fondly doted — the carrying the body to the grave — the solemn service of the dead — the casting the first earth upon the hollow coffin — the feelings which every act would produce in the mind of the uncle or the father, — and he thought of death as he had never thought before. He pictured to himself, or rather memory pictured for him, the form of the dead man as he had seen it, lying cold, rigid, meaningless, when but a few minutes before he had beheld it instinct with life, acti-

vity, and passions. He felt what an awful thing it is to sever the fine mysterious tie, which unites the soul to its earthly companion — to dissolve the bond that God's hand has created — to send the spirit burdened with all its unrepented sins before the throne of Justice — and dismiss the weak but beautiful creature of earth to foul corruption in the dark grave. He had seen thousands of mortals like himself lie dead upon a field of battle—he had aided to pour out blood in the strife of nations, but he had never felt feelings like these,—he had never regarded the dead with such thoughts as now, when he recollected that the deed had been done in an individual struggle, man to man, and hand to hand, with all the fierce personal emotions of single combat.

All these thoughts and feelings oppressed him much. He received no tidings of Edith during the day, and at night, when he went forth to wander round the dwelling she inhabited, he felt as if some tidings of dark grief were about to reach him,—some bitterer stroke than any yet endured was to fall upon him.

The night was somewhat chilly, and he wrapped round him a cloak which he had procured from the Castle ; while, wandering slowly on through the dim woods that led towards Mallory Park, he waited for the hour at which he might expect to hear something from the lady of the mansion, which would either confirm or relieve his apprehensions. To prevent his steps from being traced, he usually leapt the palings of the park instead of entering by one of the lodges, and now having done so, he bent his steps towards the house without the fear of meeting any one.

The moon had not yet risen,—low grey mysterious vapours hung about the dells and amidst the trees, and there was nothing to be heard or seen but an occasional rustle in the branches over his head, or the filmy form of a large bat, whirling close round and round him as he went.

The side of Mallory House which he approached was that towards which the windows of Edith's chamber were turned, and all was dark, except where, from those windows, stole forth the dull and shaded light of the night lamp. After remaining and listening and gazing

for some time, he struck his watch, and found that it still wanted a quarter to ten.

“ They did not come till near eleven last night,” he said ; and after pausing for a minute or two more, he turned again into the wood, and wandered on thoughtfully, for some little time. But his impatience soon mastered him, and he turned upon his steps again to keep his watch before the house.

Leaning by an old fountain — which, having fallen partly into decay, had been left by Lady Mallory in the same picturesque state in which she had found it, when she came the bride of an old man to that hall—Strafford stood and looked up towards the house, thinking, alas! not of her but of Edith Forrest. It was the hour in which imagination seems to have the greatest power upon us, when the coarser world of reality is veiled by the robe of night, and when the universe of fancy appears more peculiarly open before us, to take whatsoever colouring the mind’s mood may cast upon it. Doubt not, then, that the light in which Ralph Strafford saw it was gloomy and evil. He thought of

Edith — of her he loved so dearly and so tenderly — of her so fair, so beautiful, to whom he was fond to fancy that a harsh word could never be applied — whose fine and graceful frame seemed fitted alone for tenderness and care — whom he had hoped to watch over, to guard, to defend — from whose eyes he longed to wipe away all tears — whose lip he hoped to see smiling through life with light like that of a long summer's day — whose bosom he had thought to fill with hope and happiness and remembered joy. He thought of her, and painted her to himself withering under her father's harshness, separated from him she loved, stretched upon the bed of sickness, without a memory but pain, without a comfort in the present, without a hope in the future; the soft tints of her delicate cheek faded away to ashy paleness, the light of her blue eye dimmed or extinct, the healthful rounded limbs prostrate and unhinged in the restless languor of fever.

He was not far from the spot where he had parted with Lady Mallory two evenings before; but he was a little to the westward, where the

woods of the park sweeping away, left room for the eye to pass over a sloping variety of undulations down to the extreme horizon, so that the moon was comparatively earlier seen on that spot than where the deep masses of the trees upon the hills lay between the house and the eastern sky.

Strafford's eyes were turned towards the Hall, indeed; but, as he gazed and communed with his own thoughts, he saw in the clear water that filled the old basin of the fountain, the edge of the yellow moon rising slowly up, reflected in the clear mirror which nature offered to it. It was lovely though sad, and seemed to Strafford like the memory of a dead friend.

He bent down his eyes upon it for some minutes, and when he raised them again to look towards the house, he suddenly saw a figure in white approaching rapidly towards him from the terrace. The steps seemed to waver and to stagger as it came, but the heart of Strafford beat with strange and unaccountable expectations. At that distance and in that dim light his eyes could serve him but little to dis-

tinguish who the person that approached was, but yet a greater degree of agitation took possession of his bosom at that moment, than any other sight had ever produced in life. It was like a vision, a dream, an idle insane fancy; but yet he could not free his mind from the thought that it was Edith whom he saw. For a few instants he remained almost motionless; but then, unable to resist his feelings, he sprang forward to meet the figure that approached.

It came on straight and rapidly, and every moment his conviction became more and more strong. The moon shone full upon the face — she held out her arms towards him — he darted forward, and in a moment Edith was clasped to his heart.

Strange and extraordinary were his sensations, however. Every thing was unaccountable. She was dressed in her night clothing; a thin dressing-gown, through which he could feel the warm and feverish blood beating against his bosom; seemed to have been cast over her in haste; the feet that were in the small slippers were otherwise bare; and while for a moment

or two she remained panting in his arms, with the speed with which she had come, Strafford's mind was filled with the strangest and wildest imaginings.

“ Save me, Strafford ! ” she cried at length. “ Save me ! save me ! He will follow me here, if you do not save me ! He is cursing me now — do you not hear him ? — he is cursing me now. He came and stood by my bed-side and shook me by the arm, and cursed me again. Hark ! do you not hear him ? — Take me away ! oh, take me away ! ”

“ Whither should I take you, dearest Edith ? ” demanded Strafford, now terribly convinced that she had quitted the house in the delirium of fever. “ Where can I take you, dear Edith ? You have been in a dream, dear girl. It were better indeed, Edith, to return. ”

“ Oh no ! no ! no ! ” cried Edith ; “ not there — not there — any where but there. Would you kill me too, Strafford ? would you kill her who loves you so dearly ? I tell you he came and cursed me while I lay asleep. I am not dreaming, Strafford ; but perhaps you think me mad ;

I am so — I am partly so, Strafford ; for I know that I am ill, and say and do things that I would not. But what I tell you is true. He came and cursed me ; and if you take me not away, I shall die. Take me to Stalbrooke ! Oh, take me to Stalbrooke, Strafford !”

Agitated and alarmed, evidently seeing that she was in some degree delirious, but yet fancying he distinguished the signs of truth and reason in some parts of what she said, Strafford hesitated for a moment how to act. But the determined abhorrence which she seemed to feel in regard to returning to the house, and the apprehension that if he attempted to take her back against her will he might increase her illness, made him resolve to risk all, and carry her to one of the lodges of the park, where he could obtain assistance, and send for Lady Mallory, in order to ascertain what was the real state of the case.

“ Well, dear Edith,” he said, “ I will take you away : but you will catch cold, my beloved ; let me wrap you in this cloak ;” and taking it off he wrapt it round and round her,

so as to guard her as far as possible from the night air.

“ Oh, thank you! thank you! dear Strafford!” she said while he proceeded. “ Thank you! thank you! only take me away. I shall not catch cold. My brain and my heart seem on fire: but do not let me hear those curses any more.”

When he had secured her as far as possible from cold, he raised her in his arms and carried her towards the lodge which was at no very great distance from the spot where he stood. It consisted of a small old cottage, tenanted by a porter and his wife, and having an open iron gate, giving exit upon the high road.

As he approached with his fair burden, who clung to him as for life, ever and anon turning back her head and looking with terror towards the house, Strafford saw with some surprise and apprehension, through the open work of the gateway, what appeared a carriage and horses, with a driver walking up and down; but Edith's situation of course called for more immediate attention than any thing else, and he walked on

as fast as he could so burdened, till passing a small clump of trees within twenty yards of the gate, a man started out upon him, exclaiming, "Sir, you are my prisoner! Go with me — I charge you in the king's name!"

Edith uttered a cry of terror. "They have overtaken us! they have overtaken us!" she exclaimed. "Oh, do not let him curse me again, Strafford! Do not let him curse me!"

Strafford's heart was wrung, but there was no refuge, no escape, no means of resistance. In moments of danger and difficulty, however, his resolutions were rapidly formed and executed: he recollected the face of the man who had apprehended him, and remembered having employed him in some affairs of Sir Andrew Stalbrooke. There was another coming up rapidly from another part of the park; and as he might not know him also, he determined to draw at once what advantage he could from his acquaintance with the other.

"I surrender at once," he said, "though, indeed, there is no use of apprehending me, for, as I dare say you know, I gave notice that I

would appear to take my trial, and my word is never broken.”

“ I know it is not, Captain Strafford,” replied the man ; “ and I am very sorry, indeed, to be employed in this ; but I have nothing to do but obey the orders I have received.”

“ Oh, I do not blame you in the least,” replied Strafford. “ Hush, dear Edith ! You are quite safe, my beloved ! — Listen to me one moment,” he continued, addressing his captor. “ You know that we are old acquaintances, and if you will, you may now lay me under the greatest obligation, without any infraction of your duty.”

“ What is it, sir ?” demanded the man eagerly, and looking towards his comrade who was coming up. “ Speak quick, sir.”

“ You see this young lady,” replied Strafford ; “ she is very ill, and even now is delirious from fever ; but she has been so ill-treated by a relation, that she is anxious to place herself, this very night, under the care of my uncle, Sir Andrew Stalbrooke. What I desire is, to be permitted to carry her in this chaise, which I

suppose you have brought, to Stalbrooke Castle. After that, you shall take me where you like."

"It shall be done, sir; it shall be done," replied the officer. "But hush! not a word, till I have spoken to the other constable! Come into the lodge, sir.—Here, Jenkin, come up; the captain surrenders quietly."

Thus speaking, he followed close at Strafford's elbow to the lodge, where, at the open door of the cottage, with a candle in his hand, stood the old porter, with his wife behind him, both as pale as death, and trembling in every limb. Both bowed low as Strafford entered; and the old man exclaimed, in deprecatory tones, "I could not help it, indeed, sir! They forced me to open the gates;" while his wife, like the second part of a duet, repeated exactly the same words, with the substitution of the third person singular for the first,—"John could not help it, indeed, sir! They forced him to open the gates."

"You all did quite right!" replied Strafford; "perfectly right; but——"

"Lord bless my soul! why, here is the young

lady!" interrupted the old woman as soon as she perceived what it was that Strafford carried in his arms so carefully wrapped in his cloak.

"It is so, indeed, my good dame!" replied the young gentleman, placing Edith cautiously in the chair by the fire-side. "She is going immediately to Stalbrooke, for one of her relations has treated her very cruelly."

"Ay, that black-looking man, I am sure!" cried the old woman.

"Yes; but my good dame," said Strafford, "I am going to give you no small trouble to-night. First, if you can heat some milk and water quick, let me have it, for I fear her being chilled."

"The kettle is boiling, sir," she replied, instantly bustling into activity; and while she hastened to get all that was required, Strafford knelt by Edith's side fastening the cloak round her more securely, and gazing tenderly in her face while he asked, "Now, dear Edith, tell me, would you rather that I should send to Lady Mallory, and tell her that you are here, or go on at once to Stalbrooke."

Edith looked at him languidly, but replied two or three times distinctly, "To Stalbrooke! to Stalbrooke! oh, to Stalbrooke! I dare not go back there."

"Then to Stalbrooke it shall be!" he said. "Now, good dame," he continued, taking the cup of warm drink from her, and giving it to Edith who took it eagerly, "Now, I am going to ask you to do something else for us. This young lady is going to Stalbrooke to-night, and you must come in the chaise with us. Can you do so? Your trouble shall not be forgotten."

"Oh that I will, sir, willingly," answered the good dame; "but had I not better run down to the house and tell my lady?"

"That John shall do as soon as we are gone," replied Strafford. "You see there is no time to spare. She is very ill, as you know: she must be taken over there as soon as we can; and besides, these men will not allow of any great delays, — for they are taking me," he added, lowering his tone, "to Lallington gaol."

"Alack a day! Alack a day!" cried the good woman, half inclined to cry; "but I am

quite ready, sir. Had I not better wrap a warm blanket round the young lady?"

In this precaution Strafford readily concurred, and turned towards the constables who had been busily consulting at the door, but who now approached.

"Mr. Jenkin here consents, sir," said the man, who had actually apprehended Strafford, "upon condition that you will pay the extra expense of the chaise—for that will not be allowed—and will give your word of honour as a gentleman that you will not try to escape."

"Most willingly I will pledge my word," replied Strafford, "not to make the slightest attempt to escape till you have safely lodged me in the gaol at Lallington, and I will, moreover, give you ten guineas to cover all expenses."

The men looked well pleased, especially the one called Jenkin. The good dame of the lodge, after some ceremonies, got into the carriage first, by the directions of Strafford, who then lifted Edith in, now more completely and securely fenced against the cold, and followed himself,

while the two constables took their uneasy seat upon the splinter bar. Beckoning up the porter, who had been an astounded and almost silent spectator of all that took place, Strafford gave him directions to proceed immediately to the Hall, and inform Lady Mallory, with his best regards, of what had occurred; and then saying that he was ready, ordered that the vehicle should drive on towards Stalbrooke Castle.

The journey passed almost in silence, for the excitement under which Edith had acted seemed to have given way, and exhausted with exertion and illness she remained without uttering a word. Strafford supported her in his arms — her head leaned upon his shoulder — and it may easily be imagined how strangely mingled were his sensations as he went, holding to his bosom the being that he loved best on earth, while he himself was carried towards a prison, and she, with vehement fever upon her, risked life itself by the very journey she was undertaking.

Some persons might have added to all these painful and contending thoughts, apprehensions

of the evil construction which might be put upon his conduct and upon hers; but upright in purpose and in feelings, Strafford was satisfied with the consciousness of acting right, and feared not false imputations.

His principal apprehensions then were for Edith's safety. When he recollected the state in which she had been for several days, and the exposure to the cold night air which she had just undergone, his heart sunk at the thought of what might be the result; and every dark and painful fear took possession of his mind. As they went on, however, he felt Edith's cheek rest more entirely upon his bosom — her breathing became less quick, but more regular and easy — the small hand, which had been clasped in his, with the fingers still contracted with the impression of the terror with which she had fled from the Hall, gradually relaxed, and lay soft and less fiery to the touch. Every thing showed him that she had fallen into a tranquil sleep, and looking up thankfully towards heaven, Strafford tasted the sweet bright solace of praying for those we love.

Strange, strange were his sensations as the chaise stopped at the gates of the Castle, and the bell, whose well known sounds had so often announced his return to those within, now sounded upon his ear under such unwonted circumstances. The vehicle drove into the stone court, and several servants with lights came out, showing, that though unusually late for any one to be up in the matutinal household of Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, the principal part of the family had not yet retired to rest. One of the constables had himself sprang down and opened the door, but an old servant approached, with surprise in his countenance, and Strafford asked eagerly, "Is my uncle up?"

"Yes, sir," he said in reply; "Sir Andrew is still with the lawyers in the library. Shall I call him?"

"Yes," replied Strafford. "But first of all run with all speed to Mrs. Wallis, and ask her what room is ready for Miss Forrest, who is ill."

The man ran promptly in, while some of his fellows advanced, and assisted Strafford to de-

scend from the vehicle, still carrying Edith in his arms. She did not awake either by the stopping of the carriage or her removal from it; and by the time Strafford had carried her into the passage, the housekeeper appeared, following quick upon the footsteps of the servant who had been sent for her, with some surprise indeed, but no confusion or trepidation in her manner. Quite confident that every thing her young gentleman did was right, the old lady's only anxiety was to help him as fast as possible.

“Better carry her into the room she had before, captain,” she said. “Poor sweet young lady, how sound she is sleeping!—Every thing is quite ready, sir,—quite ready, as if I had known she was coming.”

“Thank you, Mrs. Wallis! thank you!” replied Strafford in a low voice. “If you will light me, I will carry her up. Now, some one run and tell Sir Andrew.”

At that moment one of the constables came up, and bowing respectfully to Strafford said, “We trust entirely to your word, sir; but we hope you will not be long.”

“ I should wish to stay about half an hour,” replied Strafford in a low tone; “ and in the mean time you can get some supper. I will be as quick as possible.”

The other man had advanced into the passage also, and saying a few words to each other, they continued gazing up the stairs after Strafford, as if doubting whether they ought to suffer him to quit their sight. He however proceeded on his way, lighted by the housekeeper and a maid, who by this time had joined them; and when it was too late to interfere, the constables made up their mind to let things take their course, and proceeded to seek out the servants' hall for the refreshment which had been promised them.

In the mean time Strafford bore Edith up towards the chamber which she had formerly tenanted at Stalbrooke Castle. At the top of the first flight of steps he was met by Sir Andrew himself, who came out with some surprise in his countenance at the news he had received from the servant, but who never suffered any thing to impede the present action of his mind.

With one kindly glance towards Edith as she lay in his nephew's arms, and another to Strafford's face, he lifted up his finger, as if to desire that all explanations might be delayed; and turning to the man who lighted him, he said in a low voice, "Bid the under groom go for the surgeon, directly — not a moment's delay!"

This done, he followed Strafford to Edith's room, where they placed her in her bed, still wrapped in the coverings which had enveloped her in the chaise. As Strafford gently placed her head upon the pillow Edith woke, and for a moment looked round her with a wild and scared glance. She saw none but friendly and affectionate faces, however — the countenance of him she loved gazing upon her with deep and anxious tenderness — the mild benevolent eye of Sir Andrew Stalbrooke — the quiet placid look of the old housekeeper, whose coming every morning to ask her if any thing could be done to please her, she remembered well, — all seemed to give her confidence and hope, and a smile played upon her lip for a moment, as if she were about to speak and thank them.

But Sir Andrew bent down his head, and kissed her forehead, whispering, "Say not a word, my sweet child. You are with those that love you, who have a right to love you, and will protect you. Try and sleep, dear Edith. Remember your health is invaluable to all of us. We will now leave you; Mrs. Wallis will take care of you. Come, Strafford, come, my dear boy."

But Strafford stooped down to take his parting kiss; and as he did so, Edith put forth her hand, and laid it upon his, saying in a calm and collected tone, "I am better, dear Strafford; I am much better; thank you a thousand and a thousand times, Strafford. I have been wandering sadly, I know: but what I told you is true. He came and cursed me. Oh send and tell dear Lady Mallory,— she will think me ungrateful."

"I will, I will, dear Edith," he answered. "But you are better, really better now, Edith; is it not so?"

"Much," she said, "very much—and I shall be quite well soon, I am sure."

“ I must not suffer this, my dear boy,” said Sir Andrew, taking him by the hand and leading him away, while Edith, after gazing at them till they reached the door, closed her eyes again, and once more addressed herself to sleep.

Till they had left the vicinity of her room, neither Strafford nor Sir Andrew spoke ; but after that, as they proceeded towards the library, a quick but rapid explanation was given of all that had occurred to the lover during that night.

“ I know not,” continued Strafford, after telling all the circumstances, “ I know not whether this idea that her father had come and cursed her proceeds merely from the delirium of fever, or has any truth in it.”

“ I doubt it not,” replied Sir Andrew ; “ I doubt it not in the least. I heard him treat her in the most brutal and shameful manner this very day. He promised Lady Mallory not to visit that part of the house any more ; but the promises of such a man cannot, of course, be relied upon, and I doubt not in the least,

my dear boy, he has broken this to gratify his hatred of that sweet child. But if he have done her harm," added Sir Andrew, with more emotion than he usually displayed,—“if he have done her harm, there is one in heaven and one on earth to whom he shall answer! But come, Strafford: we are busy even now upon your affairs in the library. I have got down here Sir Frederick Polaxe, to give us his advice upon your case. You have heard of him often of course, my dear boy, and know that his eloquence and his knowledge and his judgment are not to be equalled in the senate or at the bar, while, to all the rest, he adds a heart which gives the depth of personal feeling to all that he undertakes in the cause of others. I have also here our good friend and solicitor, Samuel West, whose eagerness in behalf of those to whom he is attached seldom fails to find the means of serving them. They arrived late, but we set to work upon the business immediately; and though of course you must now, my dear boy, make your abode in a prison for some time, yet with the evidence of Meakes and Lucy there cannot

be the slightest doubt that an instant verdict of acquittal will be pronounced in your favour. Two almost distinct contradictions have already been discovered in the evidence of this unfortunate young man's servant."

The last words were spoken at the library door, and the next moment Sir Andrew and Strafford entered. With one of the gentlemen of the law who were sitting there consulting, Strafford was already well acquainted, and shook hands with him warmly, as well as with his uncle's fellow magistrate, Sir Arthur Brotherton. The third gentleman was unknown to him except by the voice of fame. But he found in him those mild and graceful manners which have such inexpressible charms, although want of health, at the time, had rendered his demeanour somewhat grave, perhaps we might call it languid, except when the fire of genius blazed suddenly up, and all was light and energy.

With this small party Strafford remained some time in conversation, and he found that it was the course determined upon to draw up

immediately and transmit to London, previous to the trial, so powerful a representation of the conduct of Mr. Waters throughout the whole affair, as to leave no doubt of his being instantly removed from the commission of the peace; and in the body of the representation to notice in detail, with proper attestations, his conduct in regard to the apprehension of Meakes for the purpose of favouring young Forrest's designs upon Lucy. Such a statement had been already prepared by Sir Andrew himself immediately after the coroner's inquest, and the testimony of two or three respectable people had been added, to afford proof of the facts. But this was not considered sufficiently authentic to insure the object, especially as Sir Andrew was politically opposed to the ministry of the time; and in those days, as well as in all others, political opinions were not without their effect even upon the course of ordinary justice.

“It is rarely right or expedient,” said the principal lawyer present, “to endeavour in any degree to make a general impression upon a

jury by any means out of court ; but as in this instance every effort has been used to create an opposite prejudice, we may fairly and rightly do our best to remove it, by showing that this magistrate, and perhaps even the coroner himself, have acted entirely as partisans. Are you acquainted with the sheriff, Sir Andrew ?”

“ But slightly,” replied the baronet. “ He is a very worthy man I believe, but easily led, and somewhat embarrassed in his circumstances notwithstanding his large property.”

“ No sheriff,” said Sir Frederick, “ would of course in any ordinary case forget his impartiality in regard to the jury. Nevertheless, we must keep our eye upon the list, in order to challenge any one whom we may suspect to be an enemy.”

“ In truth,” replied Strafford, “ I do not know that I have an enemy in the county. The worst I can have to fear in regard to the jury is, that they may be all strangers to me ; and as my cause is a good one, that affords no motive for apprehension.”

“ Nor do I think there is any cause for

apprehension on any account," replied the lawyer; "only there are one or two circumstances which have caused suspicion as to an attempt being made to tamper with the witnesses. We hear that this very day, after the funeral, Mr. Forrest himself, instead of returning home, as he naturally might have been expected to do, proceeded, indeed, a part of the way on the road, but then left it, and driving to the house of the man Meakes, was conducted to a meeting with him in one of the woods."

Strafford smiled. "I rather think," he said, "that that meeting took place at Meakes's own desire, and referred to some other business, which I do not well understand."

"Perhaps I understand more of it myself," said Sir Andrew Stalbrooke; "for besides this business regarding my nephew, I have another matter which I wish you to investigate, but we will speak of that to-morrow, or even at a later period; for it is principally on this account that I have been obliged to ask you, Sir Frederick, notwithstanding your vast occupations, to remain

with me for several days, to give me assistance in matters of deep importance."

The lawyer merely bowed his head in reply, understanding at once, from the vague terms in which Sir Andrew spoke, that he was not anxious the matter should be discussed at that moment.

Some further conversation then took place on the subject of Strafford's situation, but time was wearing away; and although he would willingly have lingered on, to speak once more with Edith when she woke, yet his promise had been given, and in a short time he sent down to inform the officers that he was ready. Sir Andrew accompanied him to the door of the chaise, and then parted from him with cheerful words and looks, for he would not add even a shade to all that he knew his nephew suffered.

Strafford, on his part, pursued his journey towards the place of his imprisonment with more calmness than, perhaps, he himself expected. He had seen Edith — he had held her in his arms — he had left her under the pro-

tection of his uncle. If she recovered — and his hopes in that respect were raised also, from the comparative tranquillity with which she had woke — if she recovered, the circumstances in which she had been thus accidentally placed, might afford a presumption that the obstacles and impediments to her union with him must, of course, be cast down. He indulged such a hope at least; and, turning away his eyes from the fatal fact, that John Forrest whom he had slain was her brother, a feeling of confidence, or at least of greater confidence than he had felt for some days, now took possession of his bosom.

Stranger than all, however, the very idea of awaiting his trial in prison had by this time become, in some degree, a relief to him. It was at all events a certainty; he had hitherto remained fluctuating between hopes, and doubts, and fears, — every hour had had its anxiety — every moment its care. He should not now, he thought, be further removed from Edith than he had been before — he could hear of her with the same facility — and he should no longer

have that feeling of degrading concealment and evasion of the law which had weighed heavily upon him of late.

At first his flight had seemed, in some degree, to be tinged with the spirit of adventure, but that had soon worn off, and his lonely and wandering state of existence had become irksome to him. He now forgot to calculate the weary hours of imprisonment; he forgot to calculate how terrible would be the close restraint of a dull gaol to one who had never known any thing but freedom. He doubted not that the governor of the prison would do every thing to make him comfortable on account of his family and situation. Yet, when the carriage drove into Lallington, and the bell at the great door of the county gaol rang, and after a long and weary pause the slow doors rolled back and the carriage entered, passing under the dim grey stone gateway, a chilling crowd of icy anticipations crept over Strafford's heart, and he asked himself, "When shall I issue forth? Perhaps never!"

The governor came from his bed with sleep

in his eyes, and his first salutation to Strafford was, "I wish they had caught you a little earlier, captain."

There was a familiarity in the tone, not courteous but presuming, and Strafford felt what it was to be a prisoner.

"We will give you our best room, captain," said the governor; "and I think you can't have a more comfortable one in all England." But when having led the way and unlocked the door he ushered Strafford in, and the young gentleman met the close, foul, unventilated atmosphere of the small narrow room in which he was to spend many a weary day, he felt still more strongly what a prison is, and the dark, painful, degrading lesson was concluded and confirmed in a minute after by the harsh turning of the heavy lock, which shut him from his fellow-creatures.

CHAPTER IX.

WHEN any person promises another to be back in five minutes, he to whom that promise is made, may generally multiply the number by six, and then wait some time in expectation; but when any one promises to his own self to return in five minutes, the problem of the time at which he will return may probably be solved after the circle has been squared and the longitude discovered. In the case, however, of Lady Mallory's maid, Margaret, there was a limit fixed, which it was not likely she should overstep. That limit was the precise period at which she expected her mistress to rise, for the purpose of relieving her watch over Edith.

She certainly did promise herself not to be longer than five minutes; but the housekeeper's room was gay and comfortable, and the events of the last ten days, with all their probable consequences, formed an Atlantic of gossip,

across which even the rapid tongue of Mistress Margaret was not likely to accomplish its course in the space of many hours. At the end of about twenty minutes, however, the still-room maid was sent up to see if all continued quiet in the young lady's room, with orders to pass by that of Lady Mallory, and to listen if she herself were yet stirring. The girl returned shortly after, saying that all was quite quiet, and that she had neither heard nor seen any thing but Mr. Forrest walking along the lobby.

“ I should not wonder if he had gone to see my young lady,” said Edith's own maid, who — having heard that there was to be a loo party and a little supper in the housekeeper's room — had excused herself from attendance upon her mistress that day, by declaring that she was quite exhausted, worn out, and must go to bed. “ But he'll take no notice,” she continued. “ He doesn't much care whether she lives or dies; and, poor thing, I'm sure it would be just as well for herself if she were dead; for nobody has a very happy life of it in that family.”

Gossip was now added to gossip, and some fifteen or sixteen more minutes passed, when, to the surprise and somewhat consternation of every body, the bell at the great gates rang violently.

“Lord have mercy upon us!” cried the housekeeper. “Here’s something new happened, depend upon it.” And Mistress Margaret, fearful lest the loud summons should wake Lady Mallory, hastened back to Edith’s chamber, where all was still quiet — as well it might be — and setting down the lamp which she carried, she took up her work, and began stitching, with a droning idle movement, as if she had done nothing else for the last fortnight.

In a minute or two after, however, in rushed Lady Mallory, with her countenance pale and full of alarm.

“Where is Miss Forrest?” she demanded, breathless with haste and agitation; and rushing up towards the bed, she threw back the curtains, exclaiming, “Woman, you have killed her!”

“Killed her!” repeated the woman, slowly getting up and putting down her work; “I’m

sure I hav'n't spoken a word to her, nor she to me. She must have gone off in her sleep, poor thing."

"Look there ! look there ! shameless woman !" replied Lady Mallory ; and turning her eyes towards the bed, Mistress Margaret was struck dumb by perceiving that it was vacant.

Trembling from head to foot, she began to falter forth something about having only left the room for a minute to have the lamps trimmed ; but Lady Mallory stopped her sternly, saying, " Could you not ring the bell ? You are discharged from my service ! " and turning hastily back to her own sitting-room, she called the porter of the lodge who had brought her the news of Edith's departure for Stalbrooke, and made him repeat every word of the message he had received from Captain Strafford.

In a minute or two after Mr. Forrest, for whom she had sent, entered the room, and to him she made the man repeat the tale, which went distinctly to assert that Miss Forrest's father had come into her room, and cursed her cruelly as she lay, and that she had fled in consequence.

“The unfortunate girl in her delirium has fancied such things,” replied Mr. Forrest. “For my own part I have not quitted my room for hours. Perhaps the whole thing is an arranged scheme between her and this young man, who has carried her off to his uncle’s. I am happy to find, however, that he is at length likely to be made accountable to the law. As for Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, he shall be accountable to me for countenancing such things. And now, madam,” he continued, “has your Ladyship any further commands for me, for I am tired, and had not been long in bed when you did me the honour of rousing me.”

“I have nothing further to say, sir,” replied Lady Mallory, viewing him with a glance of cold scorn. “You have heard an account which it was necessary for you to hear, and now I hope you may sleep well.”

“As well as the maid, who you say was put to watch Edith,” replied Mr. Forrest; “at least I hope so.” And not a little pleased to see how deeply pained Lady Mallory was, he

turned upon his heel, and walked out of the room.

Mr. Forrest had not remarked on the other side of Lady Mallory the figure of a pretty country girl, who stood with her back towards her mistress, busily engaged in pouring out and sweetening properly a cup of strong coffee, for which she had been sent a few minutes before. The minute he was gone, however, the still-room maid, for she it was, turned round, and with a look, half shy, half resolute, she exclaimed eagerly, —

“ Dear me, my Lady, the gentleman says he has not left his room for some hours; and I saw him in the lobby not half an hour ago, I’m sure, and he was just coming in the way from Miss Edith’s room too. It was just between the door of your room and her corridor that I met him, my Lady.”

“ Indeed, Jane !” said Lady Mallory; “ and pray what were you doing up here at that time? I told you to bring me a cup of coffee at a quarter past eleven, but it must have been before that time.”

The girl blushed ingenuously, fully convinced in her own mind that Mistress Margaret, in whose place she had been ordered to bring up the coffee, with the express view of not taking the Abigail away from Edith, had been doing wrong in spending her time in the housekeeper's room, and had very likely sheltered herself under some falsehood. Lady Mallory remarked the warm blood rise into the girl's cheek and spread over her forehead, and as she had always been a lenient and kind mistress, she said,—

“Never mind, Jane, if you have promised not to tell, I will not ask you to break your word.”

“Oh no, my Lady,” replied the girl, “I didn't promise not to tell at all. Mistress Margaret sent me up to see if all was quiet in Miss Forrest's room, and it was then I saw the gentleman going along.”

Lady Mallory felt very indignant; but it is of the after-conduct of Mr. Forrest that we must principally speak.

We have already insinuated, or perhaps

somewhat more than insinuated, that that gentleman, though not exactly a poltroon, was not a man that could deserve the name of, a man of courage. There were days when, perhaps, had he been called upon, he might have distinguished himself by daring or gallant actions, but such was not the case every day; and it needed the stimulus of some strong passion in general to call what courage he had into action; to overcome an habitual love of life and abhorrence of danger, and make him place himself in circumstances of peril.

On the day after that, however, of Edith's escape from Mallory Hall, he rose with all those passions about him which were calculated to rouse in him the spirit of daring. The foremost of these passions was hatred and revenge; and his first act was to write a note to Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, which we need not lay before the reader in its original shape. It went, however, to call upon him immediately to send Edith back, and at the same time to give him satisfaction for the offence of having received her at all; and there was nothing that he thought

could gall, or irritate, or wound, or rankle, that Mr. Forrest did not take care to add to the general matter of his epistle. This was dispatched at an early hour in the morning, and the answer of Sir Andrew Stalbrooke was brought back by the servant about twelve o'clock. It was to the following effect: —

“ SIR,

“ I have had the honour of receiving your note, and have to inform you that the young lady you allude to, persisting in the assertion that you, in violation of your promise to Lady Mallory, came to her chamber last night, and repeated the violent and cruel language which you had made use of previously, remains safe and under my protection, where she will continue till the law compels me to resign her into the hands of others, if that should ever be the case. It will, no doubt, relieve your mind from a great weight to know, that she has not suffered, as might have been expected, from the exposure to cold and damp last night.

“ You are pleased to call my nephew a mur-

derer. I shall not in any degree harshly retaliate by comments on the conduct of a person dear to you and dead. I would fain leave those errors in oblivion which compelled my nephew to have recourse to means against him, which ended fatally for the one and most unhappily for the other.

“ You are pleased to invite me to give you satisfaction, as you term it, for receiving the young lady above alluded to into my house, when your conduct drove her from the shelter of Lady Mallory’s; and you say that you will prefer the pistol to the sword, understanding that I am too good a swordsman even for a younger man to deal with. I will not affect to misunderstand your allusion to an accidental encounter with your late nephew, when in a little moment of irritation, at being prevented from committing a very bad action, he drew his sword upon me, at the time I was in fact acting as his best friend. It is for such occasions, sir, that my sword nowadays is altogether reserved. The practice which you wish me to yield to, I look upon as both foolish, cowardly, criminal, and

unchristian ; and if I have in earlier years, when my passions were strong and my judgment not yet formed, been tempted to follow a bad fashion, I sincerely and deeply regret the fact, though, as far as I can remember, I have no occasion to regret the causes which led me to do so.

“ You say that on any pitiful excuse you will hold me up to contempt. Bad men, sir, have not the faculty of contempt ; they lose the power when they lose their own worthiness. Any contempt on the part of good but mistaken men, I am not at all afraid to encounter ; and the contempt of the good and wise, I am sure, is not likely to fall upon me. Doubtless the thing which they would justly consider contemptible, would be the fact of two old men fighting a duel on a subject which must soon be decided by the laws of the land.

“ I wish, sir, to cast no imputation upon you ; but I beg you to understand that, even in my young days, I considered that to meet a person in the way that you require was to confer an honour upon him. This honour, sir, I should

not have conferred upon you even in those days, until you had cleared yourself of one or two charges which at present remain against you. You will allow me to add, that in regard to the fact of your having violated your given word to Lady Mallory, one of her servants, as I just learn from her, saw you passing along the east lobby at the very time specified.

“ I have the honour to be

“ Your obedient servant,

“ ANDREW STALBROOKE.”

“ He has refused to fight !” cried Mr. Forrest eagerly ; “ he has refused to fight ! and he so tenacious of his honour ! I will make it known through the living world — I will call him a mere coward — they shall point at him in the theatres, and push him aside at court !”

With every bitter purpose of using each word that Sir Andrew had written to calumniate him, Mr. Forrest read the letter again ; but his eyes were attracted by words that he had scarcely remarked before, and he repeated, “ One or two charges that at present remain against me ?”

What does he mean? Can that woman, Isabella, have betrayed me? Can she have disclosed to him the secret of the poor boy's birth? It matters not! He cannot prove it! If he could, more than twenty years have past; the boy is dead! They cannot prove it! But no! she would not betray me! not from any love, or kindness, or generosity — but from pride she would keep that secret. Am I not her own nearest relation? Yet can he suspect? Can he have gained any information? His conduct and his words are equally strange. It is evident he thinks he has me at his mercy. The figure I saw at my dressing-table — can it have been more than a dream? At all events I will take my precautions — many, ay multitudes, have been ruined by keeping useless papers. They shall never prove one fact from any thing they find on me! I have been a fool to keep them so long; but I thought they might be useful."

As is ever the case, thus guilty fears mingled with evil purposes; and efforts to accomplish present wrong were crossed by efforts to conceal wrongs long past. Mr. Forrest longed eagerly

for some one to consult with, but it is the fate of evil men to deprive themselves of counsellors, or to trust in traitors. They have no other choice ; and evil, always suspicious, loves not to confide in the evil, and cannot place confidence in good. He thought of Mr. Waters, and revolved over his own circumstances in his mind to see if, by any curious means, he could obtain his advice without placing any trust in him ; but it ended by his avowing the conviction to his own heart, that Waters was one who would betray any one, and was even then a traitor to all.

As he thus thought, the servant brought him — as so often happens — a note from the very man who occupied his mind at the moment, and opening it he found that it contained various hints and suggestions for so shaking the reputation and credit of Lucy Williams, who, the writer said, had now returned to her father's house, as to render her evidence on the trial of Captain Strafford well nigh null and void. Afraid even to trust Mr. Forrest in a matter, the secret trains of which Mr. Forrest for his

own sake dare never reveal, Waters proffered his advice in ambiguous language; but in the end he pointed out plainly that a good woman, of the name of Ball, the mother of the well known farmer of that name, had been heard to speak in the harshest and most disparaging terms of Lucy; and he added, that if Mr. Forrest could see her and deal with her skilfully, he might induce her to commit herself fully upon the subject, or at all events might discover what she knew.

“The fellow’s a villain,” said Mr. Forrest as he read the note; “but he’s a clever one, which is in truth what I want, if I could but trust him — if I could but trust him. However, in this business I can act for myself. I will see the woman Ball this very day, as I go to the meeting with Meakes. There is yet time, and if I can make sure of her, I may trust that my revenge is secure. What says this man here in the postscript, however? — that he hears Sir Andrew Stalbrooke and Captain Strafford are moving heaven and earth to get him struck out of the commission of the peace. Let them

do so — let them do so — ay, and he says ‘the culprit, however, is safely lodged in gaol.’ That is something gained — a portion of revenge is sure then. He is a felon in a dungeon — that is some satisfaction. But it is not enough — it must be more, deeper, stronger — it must be life for life ! Ay, he shall die the death of a dog ! Yet this is a foretaste, an augury of success. It gives me courage ; it gives me spirit. I thought yesterday that all was going wrong.” And Mr. Forrest pressed his hands tight together with his lips smiling, while his brow was still knit into a dark and vengeful frown, offering an expression of gratified hatred, which might have served as a model for a painter.

He remained perfectly motionless in that state for more than a minute ; but then saying to himself, “ I must not forget my own security in seeking revenge — no, I will destroy them all ! ” he turned to his dressing-table, and took from his writing-desk one or two bundles of papers and letters, and from his dressing-box that small steel case which we have before mentioned.

When he had placed these carefully in his

pocket he rang the bell, and asked if the horse was ready. On being informed that it was, he descended to the court-yard and approached the side of the animal. It had belonged to his dead son, and Mr. Forrest gazed upon it thoughtfully, patted its neck, fell into a reverie of the long past, and mounted into the saddle with tears in his eyes.

There be tears, however, that soften not ; and his was a heart which misery did not tame, but rendered only the more fierce. " Evil be thou my good," is ever more or less the cry of disappointed crime, and Mr. Forrest proposed to his own heart no other solace in the agony that it endured, but the agony of others.

He rode on rapidly then, and took his way direct to the house of Castle Ball, which he knew already, by having passed it while seeking for Meakes on the former day ; and dismounting at the door, he knocked with his riding-whip. It was opened immediately by the good dame herself, who started with an exclamation of surprise on seeing a stranger, saying, " Dear me ! I thought it was Sir Andrew come back again."

The very name clouded Mr. Forrest's brow. "No, madam," he said; "but if you are, as I suppose, Mrs. Ball, I wish to have the honour of a few minutes' conversation with you."

"Oh yes, certainly, sir," said good dame Ball, stroking down her apron. "Here, John Ray, hold the gentleman's horse. Pray, sir, walk in;" and she led the way into the neat parlour of the farm-house, saying that she was sorry her son was not at home, but dared to say that she could do quite as well.

Mr. Forrest judged that it would be best, as Mr. Waters had hinted that Lucy Williams was not a little distasteful to Mrs. Ball, to open the disagreeable subject at once, and take his chance of gaining what information he could from the first explosion of the good lady's wrath. Accordingly, while Mrs. Ball placed a chair for him, and sat down herself upon the edge of another, he said abruptly, "I think, madam, you are acquainted with a young person, called Lucy Williams." And there he stopped.

Mrs. Ball gazed in his face for an instant;

but judge of Mr. Forrest's astonishment when the old lady, in a sweet and placable voice, and with an arch dimple upon her countenance replied, "Oh dear yes, sir; I know Miss Lucy very well; a nice, dear, good girl she is as ever lived; a little bit wild and fanciful sometimes, but quite right at heart, and will make the best little wife in the country. I wish her a good husband — that I do; and I don't know that it will be long first before she has one."

For a minute or two Mr. Forrest sat silent with perfect astonishment, asking himself, "Can this rascal, Waters, have been cheating me?" The next moment, however, he thought that the woman must be speaking of some one else."

"There must be two people of the same name," he said in his own mind, and then replied to Mrs. Ball, "I mean the daughter of the schoolmaster at Stalbrooke."

"Oh yes, sir; I know quite well whom you mean," replied Mrs. Ball. "Poor Mr. Williams — he was a very good sort of man, indeed, only he did not quite know how to take care of his money, and well nigh ruined himself and his

daughter too; but Miss Lucy's got good friends, that she has."

"I suppose she has," replied Mr. Forrest, with one of his usual bitter sneers—"I suppose she has, or else you would not think fit to talk of her so differently to-day from what you formerly did."

Mrs. Ball turned very red and exclaimed, "Why, you know, sir, it's very different now: as long as I thought she hadn't a penny in the world, I was angry at the thought of her marrying my son, as well I might, and I may have said a cross word or two—I don't deny it; but that's neither here nor there. Now, however, the matter's very different, since Sir Andrew tells me that he has got well nigh a couple of hundred pounds for her as a marriage portion; and when I talked to him about Harlay Pond Farm, which he would not let to young Jones because he went to law with his brother, and which would just suit me nicely when my son marries, he said he would see about it, and give me my answer on Lucy's marriage day; and when Sir Andrew says he will see about a

thing, one may always be quite sure it's as good as done."

"Oh, oh!" exclaimed Mr. Forrest, his whole heart rejoicing. "He said he would give her a couple of hundred pound, did he,— and the farm too! This is gross corruption of a witness, if ever I heard of such a thing."

Mrs. Ball's face grew redder than it had been before, having—although she did not clearly understand to what Mr. Forrest referred—a vague notion that he did not come with any very pleasant purposes. The word *corruption*, however, struck her as something to fix upon, and she exclaimed, with a strong touch of his own vinegar spirit in her tone, "Corruption, sir! I don't know what you mean by corruption. But I wo'n't have you come and talk corruption in my house, — that I wo'n't."

"I mean, woman," replied Mr. Forrest, "that your language now, and your former language concerning that weak silly girl, of whom my poor nephew was so foolishly fond——"

"Woman, quotha!" exclaimed Mrs. Ball, her whole face blazing up into a fury. "Wo-

man, indeed! So you are the uncle of that young scoundrel who got himself killed, as he well deserved. Lucky for you, master, that my son isn't at home, or he'd whack you as you've never been whacked since you were at school, I'll warrant. — Come, bundle yourself off: I shall have to wipe the chair when you are out of it. The cart wo'n't need four horses that carries you to the devil. Corruption, quotha! — Woman, indeed! I like your manners: pray, where were you at school? Come, sir, move off, or I'll call in one of the men from the yard, to see whether they can't carry you."

Mr. Forrest satisfied himself by rising with a look of scorn, contented at least to have got hold of information, which he doubted not, in clever hands, might be made to prove that Sir Andrew Stalbrooke had been bribing witnesses in favour of his nephew. This in the case of Lucy was all that he could now hope for, and proceeding out of the house, he mounted his horse; while Mrs. Ball, like a floating battery, moved after him to the door, and continued to

pour upon him a fire of invectives, which much amused and edified the labourers in the farm-yard.

“ I hope my son, Castle Ball, may meet him,” she cried, as she saw him take the way down by the river. “ I hope my son, Castle Ball, may meet him and know him ; and if he doesn’t swinge his jerkin for the old chap, I’m no mother of his. He ’s taking just the way for it, and Castle must be coming up about this time.”

In the mean while Mr. Forrest rode on, proceeding to the little steep bridge over the river which we have mentioned ; and thence, turning to the right by the small bridle path along the stream, he wound under the wooded banks of Stalbrooke and Mallory. The hour of his appointment with Meakes was not yet come, and he rode very slowly, gazing as he did so into the stream, as if trying to see some of the finny inhabitants of its waters.

For a considerable way the river ran shallow, brawling amongst stones and pieces of rock, and offering many a bright ripple and little tumbling

pool favourable to the angler. It was not till the course of the stream reached another bridge, where the road turned away from its margin, and entered for a space the wood, that the stream acquired any depth. It then became more tranquil, however, and — passing on to a little green in the heart of the wood, beyond which to the left, or the Stalbrooke side of the river, lay the small farm, called Harlay Pond Farm — it poured over an embankment, with sluices and a small wooden bridge, into a deep mill-pond, which had formerly fed the wheel of a mill now decayed, called Harlay Pond Mill.

The quantity of water which poured in a rushing stream into this pool, together with the height of the ruined mill-wheel, and the impediments raised to the progress of water on the other side, showed that the depth there must be very great ; and Mr. Forrest, when he reached the bridge, paused for several minutes and gazed down the stream. He then seemed to listen, but no sound was heard, and dismounting from his horse, he unbuckled the bridle, and fastened the animal to a tree.

He then advanced slowly from the bridge along a small path, evidently seldom if ever used, till he came opposite to the sluice. He there took a step or two upon the bridge of wooden planks, and stood gazing down into the depth, as if hesitating at some act which he proposed to commit. The next moment, however, he took from his pocket the papers which he had brought from his writing-desk, and then looked about on the ground for some heavy substance to sink them to the bottom.

However, he murmured to himself after a moment, "No — no — they might detach themselves and float up — no — I must burn these." And, throwing away a stone he had taken up, he replaced them in his pocket. "This, however," he continued, taking out the steel case, "this there is no fear of, and that is the most dangerous." And stooping over the railing, he threw it into the very centre of the pool. When he had done so, he gazed anxiously and carefully around, and then turning his steps back to the other bridge mounted his horse, and rode slowly on to his rendezvous with Meakes.

CHAPTER X.

THE part of the wood where Meakes had fixed his abode, had during that morning lost a great deal of its tranquil and silent character. The wild chase, the remote and sometimes gloomy wood, had been enlivened by the coming and going of manifold persons ; so that, as the good old soldier sat in his leafy covert, he had more the air of a king receiving his court, or a general hearing intelligence of the enemy, than of an amateur or professed poacher in a well chosen hiding-place.

All was quiet and calm, however, by the time that Mr. Forrest arrived at the spot, and Meakes was sitting busy in the laudable occupation of working a large casting net, in finishing which he seemed in some haste, and showed great skill and dexterity. Every thing was perfectly silent around, his dog lay couched at his feet, and a large raven cawed in one of the trees above his head, taking flight as Mr.

Forrest approached, and affording satisfactory evidence that there had been no movement on the part of Meakes for some time at least.

If there had been any hesitation or doubt, in the mind of Mr. Forrest, as to the propriety of the step he was about to take — and we do not mean to say that there had not been some apprehensions crossing his mind since his last visit to the same place — those doubts were almost altogether removed by the calm aspect of every thing around the old soldier, the tranquillity of his occupation, and the indifference of his aspect. Whether Meakes did or did not see a hesitation in the expression of the countenance of Forrest as he came up, I cannot tell; but he at once began the war in the way he judged fitted to put an end to any such doubts.

“So you have nabbed the captain, I hear, sir,” he said.

“Yes,” replied Mr. Forrest; “he was apprehended last night in Mallory Park.”

“Ay! but you wo’n’t nab me though,” rejoined Meakes. “I’ll tell you what, sir: I’ve been thinking over what you told me yesterday, and

I say still, as I said then, I would do any thing on earth almost — baiting one or two things that I ought not to do — for an old comrade. Now Ferdinand Mason was an old comrade, but you are not the man.”

“ But I tell you,” answered Mr. Forrest in an impatient tone, “ I tell you I am the man ! As sure as you are sitting there and I standing here, I am that Ferdinand Mason that you knew twenty years ago in Germany ! ”

“ Now listen,” said Meakes, putting on an argumentative air, “ you see I’ll prove it to you, you can’t be the man. I remember very well, when we were together there, a gun burst in his hand and tore all the inside of his hand and the fork of his thumb, you see. Now, when you shook hands with me yesterday, devil a scar was there upon it at all ; and I remember it all scars and different colours, like a piece of toasted cheese.”

“ I tell you once more,” answered Forrest, “ that I am that very same man. I will show you not one but several letters which I received under the name of Mason at that very time; and

as for the scar you mention, that's proved in a minute, for it was my left hand was hurt, and my right that I gave you yesterday."

"That may be—that may be," cried Meakes, "and if it be, I don't know what I shan't do; for I've been thinking all last night, that though you might be very like that same Mason, and have got a knowledge about him, Lord knows how! you could not be he on account of the scar. Now let me help you to get your glove off. You've got better wonderful soon after the mangling with that beast of a stag. 'Pon my soul, there's the scar just as it should be. Well now, I've no doubt but you are Mason. You may show me the letters if you like or not."

"Oh, I will show them to you," replied Forrest, "to settle your incredulous mind upon the subject completely. You are a sad doubter, my good friend."

"Ay, that's what they used to say of *you* in the army," answered Meakes drily; "that you would never believe in a God till you couldn't help it; nor in the devil, till he got hold of you. Oh, but these are the letters, are they?"

“ You may read the addresses of all of them,” replied Forrest, “ but of course the contents are private, and I trust to your honour.”

“ The backs are enough — the backs are enough,” cried Meakes : — ‘ Ferdinand Mason, Esq.’ — ‘ Lieutenant Ferdinand Mason,’ — ‘ Ferdinand Forrest, Esq.’ — ‘ Lieutenant Ferdinand Mason.’ What, then, you went by two names at once, did you? you are a bold fellow, and I dare say had two wives at once too.”

“ No, no,” replied Forrest, with a grim smile. “ One wife at a time is enough for any man, and too much for most.”

“ Well, but all is right I see,” replied Meakes; “ and now, as you are my old comrade and acquaintance — I beg your honour’s pardon for taking such a liberty ——”

Forrest held out his hand, saying in a kindly and familiar tone, “ Oh, that is all nonsense! my good friend.”

Meakes took it and shook it heartily, continuing, “ Let us sit down and talk the matter over, and see what it is you want me to do.”

The pleasant conviction forced itself upon

the mind of Mr. Forrest, that he had by no means made so much progress as he had imagined ; and the task of sitting calmly down and stating his purposes in plain direct words, was not by any means one that he liked or approved of. His views had been produced on the preceding day gradually, and mingled with other things. But now he laboured in vain to bring it about in the same way, Meakes gave him not the slightest assistance.

“Why, I imagined,” said Mr. Forrest, “that you understood perfectly what I wished.”

“Oh no,” replied Meakes — “I had a guess ; and a guess is but a guess, you know, sir ; and when any thing ’s to be done, it ’s right to know what is to be done ; for if one doesn’t know, it ’s a hundred chances to one that one doesn’t do it.”

Thus intrenching himself in truisms, without even venturing upon any of his favourite similes or illustrations, for fear of giving Mr. Forrest something to lay hold of, Meakes continued obdurate ; and at length his companion, after fixing his eyes for a few minutes upon the

ground, replied in a more decided tone, "Well then, Meakes, I will tell you what it is I wish you to do, exactly and at once. To quit this place immediately, say to-morrow, and take a trip to France, or to the Low Countries, which are both open to you at present; and you shall have a hundred guineas, or call it a hundred and fifty guineas, to pay your expenses."

"Five times over," answered Meakes. "But what am I to fetch, sir, what am I to bring? I must have an errand. — Now, listen to me," he continued, as he saw a look of impatience come upon Mr. Forrest's countenance — "I will put the matter right in a minute."

"The fellow is seeking to increase the price," thought Mr. Forrest. "Well, he must have it, be it what it will."

"Well, the matter is this," continued Meakes, "we are old friends and comrades, you see, sir, and have seen some sport together at different times; but that is neither here nor there, and I'd do any thing that I could to serve you. But you come and ask me to go off from my own place for six weeks or so, and you don't

come to the point about the why or wherefore. You used always to be a sad hand at that. No getting you to make a dead point; but you would go creeping after the game, to see if you couldn't drop upon it sitting."

Mr. Forrest bit his lip, but the other went on: "Well, now I'll tell you what it is you want. See if I'm not right. You want me to get out of the way, because you think that I shall say something at the trial which will show that Captain Strafford couldn't help killing your nevoy; and you wish me not to be here to give evidence at all. Is not that it, Mr. Mason, or Forrest, as the case may be?"

"Something very like it," replied Forrest, brought to the point; "but I should think my reasons mattered very little."

"I beg your pardon," answered Meakes. "Now you see I'm your old comrade and friend, and I'm willing to do you the greatest kindness in my power."

"Well, that is kind, that is nobly kind," said Mr. Forrest, holding out his hand, which Meakes once more took and shook heartily,

saying, "Don't get up, don't get up: first we must argue this matter; and, as the very greatest kindness I can do you, I'll give you a bit or two of advice, and I'm sure you'll be persuaded like a good right-hearted gentleman, which I always thought you to be; though men did say you used to treat your wife very bad. But that was no business of mine. I wasn't your wife, you know."

Mr. Forrest was by no means pleased with this exordium, but he remained in gloomy silence to see what would come of it; and Meakes, after a pause, as if to take breath, went on: — "You see, after all's done and over, Mr. Mason, or Forrest, as the case may be, this Captain Strafford is as good a young man as ever lived; frank, and free, and generous, with a hundred kind thoughts and feelings for other people flying about his head from morning till night, like pigeons about a dovecot; and then your nephew, sir, was doing a very wrong thing, and trying, upon a false pretence, to carry away a poor innocent girl, to ruin her, and then most likely

treat her like a cobbler's cur. That wasn't right, you know, Mr. Forrest."

The old soldier looked in his companion's face; but Forrest remained in stern and sullen silence, and Meakes went on in a tone more persuasive than reproachful: "I wouldn't have done such a thing in my wildest days; no, that I wouldn't, for the prettiest girl in all the world, and the Indies into the bargain. Well, then, sir, it was fit enough that your nephew should be stopped in what he was about; ay, and, mayhap, made to smart a little too. So if he chose to draw his sword upon Captain Strafford, when he came up accidentally and stopped him, what could Captain Strafford do, but run him through the body?"

Mr. Forrest started up with fury in his face, exclaiming, "I did not come hither to hear this — I did not come hither to hear this!" But Meakes caught him gently by the arm, saying, "Come, come, don't fall into a passion. I want to do you a kindness, upon my word I do, if you will but sit down and listen to me."

Forrest paused for a moment or two in sullen

silence, and then cast himself down again, knowing that nothing further was to be lost, and entertaining some hopes of a good result after all, from Meakes's professions. That hope was increased by Meakes's next words.

“ I never wish any gentleman to give up his revenge,” said the old soldier ; “ it would not be altogether honourable and gentlemanlike if he did ; it wouldn't be natural : a ferret catches a rabbit by the back of the neck ; and a trout rises at a fly ; and a pike will give a shining dace a pinch with his teeth, even when he doesn't want to eat him ; so why shouldn't a man fly at his enemy too. But every thing is in reason, you know, sir ; and why should you seek to hurt Captain Strafford more than is in reason. We wo'n't talk of the other young gentleman that's gone, for that I see makes you snarl ; but now, if you'll take a friend's advice — it will be better for you, and you will be happier afterwards — you will just let matters take their course. The Captain's shut up in prison ; he'll be there for three weeks to come ; some say more ; and surely you'll have revenge enough

with that punishment upon him, when he deserved no punishment at all. Come, come, Mr. Forrest, think of it better; let the matter go on its own way, don't you stir in it at all. Captain Strafford will be acquitted, let you do what you will; and if you stir more in the matter, may be you will get yourself into scrapes that you don't expect."

If Mr. Forrest had possessed any means of shooting Meakes upon the spot, and any security that he would not be discovered, there can be no doubt of what would have been the fate of the old soldier at that moment. He once more started up, with uncontrollable rage expressed in every line of his countenance, and replied fiercely, "I came neither to hear you defend a murderer, abuse my murdered nephew, or give me your wise counsel to let a felon escape. All I have to ask of you is, after all your professions, will you, or will you not, do what I require?"

"'Pon my soul," replied Meakes, rising quickly also, "I wonder you have the impudence to ask me. If you wo'n't do what I ask,

why should I do what you ask? But come, come, Mr. Forrest, be persuaded; listen to good advice. If I were you, the moment the cause came on, I'd drop the prosecution, call no witnesses, and leave the matter as it is. Now pray do be persuaded, and do what is just and right for once in your life."

"If I did what was just and right," said Mr. Forrest, "I should knock you down."

"Those that have tried it," answered Meakes coolly, "have neither found it easy, pleasant, nor profitable. Tim Meakes is a tough bait for any fish to gorge. But, putting aside such stuff as that, do let me persuade you, and if you do, I can assure you you will spare yourself a great deal, and say, years hence, perhaps, that I was the best friend that ever you had in your life."

"You are a cursed treacherous scoundrel," replied Mr. Forrest; "and I doubt not will go and swear to-morrow that I have come to bribe you, and tamper with your evidence, after first having sent for me yourself."

"If I did," answered Meakes, "you know

very well that I should swear nothing but the truth. But I shan't do that, either, Mr. Mason, or Mr. Forrest, as the case may be. No, sir, about all that, I shall hold my tongue; and they shall not make me say a word. I am not a grass cat*, to squeal like a young baby at the first pinch. But as to Captain Strafford, sir, I shall tell the truth, the whole truth, and nothing but the truth: you may make yourself as sure of that as if you had heard it. Then, touching my having sent for you, and held what the outlandish folks call a palaver with you, and all that,—you see, Mr. Forrest, whenever we find a fox out of his earth in the hunting season, we stop all the earths round about, so that he must run for it. Now hang me, Mr. Mason, if we have not stopped all your earths for you, and I do not think you will find a hole to get into in the country; so you had better take to your legs and make a burst of it; for I'll be shot if the dogs are not after you."

"I do not understand you, sir," exclaimed

* *i. e.* A hare.

Forrest, turning somewhat pale; "be so good as to tell me what dogs you mean. I do not understand such fine allegories."

"No, no, Mr. Forrest," exclaimed Meakes, with a shrewd look; "I am an old fox myself, and do not easily say more than I like; but I have given you a fair warning, as I told the folks I would; and I have tried to persuade you to do what is right; but if you will neither take the warning, nor do as I say, why it is your own fault, you know. We should give every beast a start. You have a fair start now, and if you do not make the best of it, I cannot help you any farther. No man can do more than he can do, in the situation he may be in. I may have wings and a broad back, like other birds, but it is only a stork that can carry his grandfather over a style, as I have seen them do many a time. So now I have done, and no more to say."

The vague warnings of Meakes, and his allusions to unknown dangers, were well calculated to fill the bosom of Mr. Forrest with fear. As we have shown elsewhere, though not

a coward, he was not constitutionally a man of great courage; and every man who leads an evil life stores his mind with fears, which, like wasps from their nest, rush out and sting altogether on the slightest alarm. Many circumstances within the last few days had already led him to believe that part of his history was known to more than Lady Mallory; and Meakes now raised up new phantasms of discovery, exposure, and punishment preparing for him, without giving him a distinct perception of how or where.

This, to a mind like his, eager, irritable, and violent, was scarcely endurable; and he would now fain have staid and asked more, and cross-questioned Meakes, with the appearance of reconciliation and friendship, though the old soldier seemed no longer inclined to protract the conversation. But as he was arranging his plan for so doing, there came a sound of some one pushing through the bushes behind in great haste, and crying, "Meakes! Meakes! Master Meakes! lend us a hand here, or rather come and show us how best ——"

The speaker, no other than the good farmer

Castle Ball, paused abruptly on seeing some one with the old soldier; while Forrest, on the impulse of the moment, made a hasty retreat by the little path which he had followed to arrive at the dingle; and mounting his horse, which he had left tied in the road, trotted on in a different direction from that of Mallory Hall.

The moment he was gone, Meakes, with a low laugh, put his finger to his lips, and uttered his peculiar whistle; but even before it was given, the branches behind him were in agitation; and coming forth from the back of the little hut which he had constructed, appeared a body of three sapient and respectable persons, who had acted as unseen witnesses to his conference with Mr. Forrest. The first of these was no other than Sir Andrew Stalbrooke's worthy solicitor, Mr. West; and the other two proved to be his clerk and the town-clerk of Lallington.

“Admirably well done, indeed, Mr. Meakes,” said the lawyer — “with skill, judgment, and kindness too. It is now his own fault, and not yours, whatever may befall him.”

“ You see, sir,” answered Meakes, “ that the fellow’s a rascal. He always was a scoundrel, though I say it, who shouldn’t say it, for we had many a frolic together ; but I declare, when we heard that he was drowned in the Elbe, there wasn’t a soldier in the division that didn’t say they were glad of it, except myself. However, they have a saying in that country, that you can’t drown a wolf ; and here he is on his four legs again as fast as ever. However, as he’s an old comrade, and all that, there is not one of you must try to make me swear to any thing against him ; and if it hadn’t been for the promise that I should give him every chance, both about Captain Strafford and about getting away, I wouldn’t have undertaken it at all, do you see.”

“ You know Sir Andrew well enough,” replied Mr. West, “ to be quite sure that he would not wish you to do any thing cruel or unhand-some ; and, in truth, it is not intended to punish him, as might doubtless be done, though he thinks that the time which has elapsed renders him secure. All that we intend to do, is to give

him a severe fright, and, by holding punishment over his head, force him to do all that is right and necessary of his own accord."

"That is fair enough — that is fair enough," answered Meakes; "but you'll find him a dog, I've a notion, not easily taught to dance. However, here I am for any one that wants me; and now this very night I'll go back to my own house again, and hang me if I think I'll bivouack again till the winter's over."

"You must come with me first, Meakes," said Castle Ball; "I've a bit of poaching for you to do, man, and you never refused that in your life. I don't mind mentioning it before this gentleman here; and he may go and tell Sir Andrew, if he likes; and tell him, moreover, that he may send down all his keepers too; but that I'll have my will of it, and be answerable to him to-morrow morning."

"I have no doubt Sir Andrew wo'n't object," said Mr. West; "though your poaching must be of a curious kind, farmer, to be undertaken in the clear day, in this manner."

"Oh, we are bold men in these parts, sir,"

answered Castle Ball; "and I've got half a dozen young men there down at the bottom of the copse, that would thrash half the keepers in England."

"Oh, then I suppose we had better not meddle with you," answered Mr. West; "and perhaps had better betake ourselves to the Castle as fast as possible. Whenever you have done your poaching, Meakes, come up to the Castle too, for we must have a grand muster to-night, and perhaps even proceed to action."

"I sha'n't fail, sir, I sha'n't fail," answered Meakes; "and if I might be so bold as to offer my advice — though I know, your worship, that for me to advise you, is just like a hare advising a fox."

The lawyer, with a smile, made him a low bow, in gratitude for his illustration; but Meakes proceeded unabashed: — "But if I might offer you my advice, you would perhaps proceed to action at once; for that fellow every now and then takes fits of fright; and though, no doubt, if he were to show fight, you would beat him, wolf to wolf like,

yet I doubt very much, however cunning you may be, that you can run so fast, or turn so quick, as he can, if once you set him going."

The good-humoured lawyer laughed outright. "Certainly, my good friend," he said, "as the worthy knight of La Mancha observed to his squire Sancho, your comparisons are not very savoury; but I must forgive them, nevertheless, not being quite so much of a wolf as you seem to imagine; and all that I have to beg in return is, that you will lose no time in coming up to the castle. In an hour's time we shall have determined upon our proceedings; and it will be necessary to act with decision at once, in order to get possession of this good gentleman's papers, if we act at all."

"I wo'n't fail, sir, — I wo'n't fail," answered Meakes. — "And now, Castle, let us hear what it is you want?"

Without waiting to hear any explanations on the part of Castle Ball, the lawyer and his companions hastened back as fast as they could towards Stalbrooke Castle; but as the way was somewhat long, they did not arrive there for a

full hour and a half. Dinner had waited for Mr. West, though it was nearly five o'clock before they got back, and Sir Andrew Stalbrooke was found in the library still in busy conference with Sir Frederick Polaxe. The latter, to say the truth, was extremely hungry; for those were days when hunger visited men at early hours; and fearing that Mr. West, whose whole soul was always in his client's affairs, would detain them to give a long account of what had taken place at the meeting in the wood, he exclaimed as soon as he saw him, "Come, West, come, Sir Andrew's dinner has been waiting I know not how long. Have you been successful?"

"Entirely, and totally," answered Mr. West, who was hungry too. "We have proof positive of the identity."

"Well, well; all the particulars you shall give us at dinner," said the counsellor. "In the mean time we have not been idle, and we have obtained the distinct certainty, not only that the small box of papers, on which all depends, is in existence, and apparently untouched,

but that we can put our hand upon it in a moment."

"Then we have nothing to do," answered Mr. West, "but to send for a couple of constables, despatch a note to Sir Arthur Brotherton, and repair to Mallory as quickly as possible."

"After dinner, after dinner, if you please," replied the other. "But, my good Sir Andrew, I am sorry to see you look so sad, when every thing is proceeding more favourably than it was possible to have imagined."

"I am not sad, my dear sir," replied Sir Andrew; "but I am, as you may easily imagine, most anxious. The situation of my nephew, however favourably things may look, — the relapse of this sweet girl, who is upstairs sick in my house, — all these things weigh upon my mind, and, I am afraid, make me very discourteous and inhospitable. I will just write a note to Sir Arthur, however. You, West, send for the two constables: by that time our homely meal will be served; and then to dinner, with what appetite we may."

CHAPTER XI.

WE must now follow Mr. Forrest on his way, which, as we have said, was chosen in the opposite direction to the house of Lady Mallory. After riding on for some way, he came to a place where three or four roads divided, and where a tall old finger-post reared itself in the angle of one of the hedges, pierced with worms, covered with green mould, and bearing not the slightest vestige of those directions which it once afforded to the weary wayfarer. It was the image of a conceited critic holding up its dull straight head, as if it were the only source of information upon earth, yet affording none to any one, and possessing in reality none itself.

“This is pleasant, certainly,” said Mr. Forrest, looking up at the finger-post. “Here, when I am in the greatest haste, I can find nothing to direct me.”

But as he thus thought, he heard the notes

of a well-known air ; and looking down one of the lesser roads in the chase, he saw a boy with a spade over his shoulder come whistling slowly up towards him.

“ Pray which is the way to Lallington, my boy ? ” demanded the traveller.

The boy replied ; but we will spare his answer to the reader, who probably is in haste, as well as we are. It served at all events to guide Mr. Forrest on his way, and in about a quarter of an hour more he entered the small country town which we have chosen to designate by the name of Lallington. He easily found the fine large brick house, within its own walls and gardens, inhabited by the Right Worshipful Mr. Waters ; and ringing the bell, a servant in gorgeous livery admitted him to the spacious tall-ceilinged room where Mr. Waters was seated. Though there were glasses and bottles on the table, and evidence irrefragable that the worthy lawyer and magistrate had been wooing the consolations of a very potent spirit, it was clear, most clear, that the lawyer’s mind was not so much at ease, his spirit not quite so

tranquil, as is generally the case when schemes succeed, and plans are going on prosperously. Ill humour had raised him a little bit out of servility; apprehension had brought Mr. Forrest low; and instead of the latter taking the high ground of old family and assured fortune and the other placing himself in the lower station of ancestors unknown and wealth but increasing, they seemed to meet upon level ground, shook hands familiarly, and sat down to converse with anxious eagerness of all the points and particulars of the situation in which they were placed.

“ Well, my good sir, what have you done ? ” demanded Waters eagerly: “ I hope that my advice has proved successful.”

“ Any thing but, any thing but, Mr. Waters,” replied Mr. Forrest. “ In regard to the girl Lucy, indeed, we may, I trust, succeed; though this has been brought about in the most opposite manner to that which you expected.”

“ No matter for that, no matter for that,” replied Mr. Waters; “ I have no conceit about me, and it doesn't matter two straws to me

how it's done, so it is done. But pray let me hear how this matter has been managed."

Mr. Forrest told him; and Waters rubbed his hands with glee, the clouds upon his brow giving way for a moment, and his eyes sparkling with delight.

"That is capital!" he exclaimed, "that is capital! We shall quash her evidence altogether, if we have not a good case of perjury against her; and we shall contrive easily to make Sir Andrew's boasted virtue and uprightness turn out knavery and corruption. Why that woman Ball, put her in the witness-box, and you'll make her say any thing you please, by getting her into a passion. Leave Sergeant Per-siffage to do that; I'll give him a hint or two."

"But, unfortunately," said Mr. Forrest, "the evidence of Meakes will overthrow all."

"But I thought ——" said Waters.

"Do not think at all, but listen," replied Mr. Forrest; and he then proceeded to tell his companion a great part of that which had taken place between him and Meakes during that morning.

Mr. Waters looked confounded, and, rising from his chair, walked up and down the room in thought for a minute or two. Still, however, he saw the matter in but one point of view, not knowing the dark secret of Mr. Forrest's bosom. The hints which Mr. Forrest mentioned, of dangers likely to accrue, struck him but little; and he thought of all that had passed solely as it referred to the trial of Captain Strafford.

"We must manage this Mr. Meakes somehow," he said, returning to the table. "You must leave him to me, Mr. Forrest; and I will deal with him by some means or another, depend upon it. I should not care for that matter, if I hanged him myself. I should think we might almost get up some charge of felony against him. I wo'n't stick at the matter now, be the risk what it may."

"But I thought you were so afraid of Lady Mallory," said Mr. Forrest, with one of his irrepressible sneers, "that you dared not move to the right hand or to the left, for fear of treading upon her Ladyship's toes."

"I had many things to fear, besides Lady

Mallory, Mr. Forrest," replied Waters, shutting his teeth close: "but when those things which we have feared have come upon us, we lose the fear of them, Mr. Forrest."

"That is true, too," replied Mr. Forrest, musing; but Waters went on:—"I had a notice, sir, this morning from London, that government had ordered strict investigations to be made into my conduct as a magistrate of this county; and that if the statements prove true which have been sent in regarding me, I am to be dismissed from the commission immediately. If not, even, I am required to withdraw at the end of six months, as no more local attorneys are to be employed upon the bench. I know whence all this comes from, Mr. Forrest, very well; and I even see farther than this still; for I can see what will follow; so I may as well have something for my pains, whether it be revenge or not."

"Ay, now you understand the pleasure of revenge, do you?" said Mr. Forrest.

"I may have known something about it before," answered Mr. Waters drily. "But

I'll tell you what, sir ; I committed a great fault, and a great folly, in having any thing to do with your nephew at first ; and it has got me from one bad business to another : but as I've begun, I'll go through with it, and see whether I cannot save something out of the fire. They've taken away my fears from me themselves. I cannot lose much more than I see they intend to make me lose ; so I may as well try if I cannot gain something, whatever it is ; and if, sir, I'm a great loser in this business, I hope and trust you will do your best to make up for it."

" My agency," replied Mr. Forrest, " is, I fear, far inferior in value to that of Lady Mal-lory : but yet my property is tolerably large ; and all I have to say, Mr. Waters, is—— "

" We understand each other, sir ; we understand each other," said Mr. Waters. " And now let us set to work, hand in hand, to bring this business to a right end."

Mr. Forrest smiled, well pleased ; for he had now, he fancied, got the only hold upon Mr. Waters which it is possible to have upon a man

of his character. He felt not quite so much alone in his proceedings; and he asked himself whether it would be possible to gain his advice, and secure his co-operation in other matters, without making Waters a participator in his secrets, or putting himself in his power.

“Do you really think, Mr. Waters,” he said, “that there is any chance of getting hold of Meakes?”

“I think there is a chance of getting hold of any man one likes,” replied Waters; “thank God, the laws of this country, if properly managed, give one great facilities; and you see one thing is pretty notorious, Meakes has done a great many things contrary to the law, and has been suffered to go on in so doing for years. Now it will be hard indeed if we can’t some way patch up a business against him.”

“But what think you,” said Mr. Forrest, “of these sort of threats he made use of?”

“Threats!” said Mr. Waters — “threats! did he use threats? Did he put you in personal fear?”

“No, not exactly,” replied Mr. Forrest — “I

mean what he said about my getting out of the way as soon as possible, and about the dogs being after me, and all that."

"Why I can't exactly say," answered the lawyer, beginning to suspect in some degree that the tablet of his client's conscience was not quite so clear as it might have been. "You are the best judge of that, Mr. Forrest. Pray was there any little transaction about the time when you formerly knew Meakes, that you would not exactly like raked up just now?"

Mr. Forrest said something vaguely about gay young men being always in scrapes, and nobody exactly liking to have all the transactions of their early years talked about when they had reached the sober maturity of age; but he took extremely good care to keep off the subject uppermost in his thoughts and apprehensions at that moment. Waters, however, on his part, was by no means disinclined to know more of Mr. Forrest's private affairs. He saw and knew that this new client was wealthy; and he wished, if their two fates must run together to a certain degree, to make the bonds between them such

as would not be easily broken by the richer of the two.

“Come, come, Mr. Forrest,” he said, speaking in a familiar and kindly tone; “a man’s lawyer must be his father-confessor, you know: you must deal a little more in particulars.” He found, however, that in Mr. Forrest he had a client who was not at all inclined to be more communicative than necessary; and all that he could draw forth by every manœuvre, whether by traps cunningly laid for confidence, adroit insinuations, or direct attacks, amounted to no more than this, that there were things resting on Mr. Forrest’s memory, towards the period of his early acquaintance with Meakes, which might be excessively unpleasant, if not dangerous, to him to have investigated at the present time.

We are willing to believe that, with the generality of human beings, the thoughts which regulate their general conduct and demeanour form the grand stream of their mind; and that any little accidental reservations and thoughts apart, are but occasional deviations,

which do not very much affect the candour of social intercourse. But there are men, the great bulk of whose thoughts may be said to be under-currents; who, while they are talking to you of one thing, are continually pursuing a latent train of thought about other things, making their calculations, combining, conceiving, imagining *apart*; and whose character, to revert to the figure which we have used above, is — as we have reason to suppose is the case with part of the ocean — unfathomable to any ordinary means, not so much from any real profundity, as from every thing that attempts to plumb it being carried away by the currents below the surface.

Such was the case with Mr. Waters; and during the whole time that Mr. Forrest was speaking to him, and that he himself was pursuing the open or less concealed purpose of driving that gentleman to farther explanations, he was in his own breast pursuing a completely different course of considerations, calculating how he was most likely to derive advantage

from his new client, and in fact to what account existing circumstances might be turned.

When, then, he found that Mr. Forrest had cause for apprehension, and would not explain what, he determined, after various minute and laborious examinations of the reasons for and against, to advise that gentleman strongly to follow the advice of the worthy Timothy Meakes, and betake himself to London as fast as possible, leaving the whole of his business to be transacted by him, Mr. Waters, during his absence.

“ I must stand here and abide the brunt myself,” he said: “ there would be neither a possibility nor an advantage in my avoiding the matter. I will therefore now, Mr. Forrest, boldly and straightforwardly undertake to conduct this business for you against Captain Strafford, who is here, thank Heaven, safe in gaol. I will deal with Meakes too; and doubt not that with him I shall succeed. If no fair means will do, I shall not fail to employ foul; and the blame, if any, rests upon me, you know, Mr. Forrest.”

Mr. Waters had, however, determined upon another proceeding, of which he said nothing; which was, to induce Meakes, by some means, to give him those particulars with regard to his client's former history which Mr. Forrest had not given himself. These he doubted not easily to obtain from the old soldier, by affecting to be already thoroughly acquainted with the whole.

“ I need not tell you, Mr. Forrest,” he said, “ that I shall bestir myself, for that I shall do for my own interest; and if you would take my best advice upon your own situation, it would be this — Go home to Lady Mallory's directly; give her Ladyship to understand that you intend to take your departure about three or four o'clock to-morrow afternoon; set out on horseback, as if you were intending to come to me at an earlier hour, taking your poor nephew's servant with you; and then, putting yourself into a post-chaise, proceed to London, and there remain till we see how all this matter turns. In the mean time you had better place such of your papers as are of any consequence, and you would not like to have examined, into some safe deposit.”

“ I will, I will,” replied Mr. Forrest ; “ I will do so immediately.” And taking out of his pocket the two bundles of letters we have before mentioned, he stalked gravely up to the fire, which, as it was an autumn day, was blazing briskly in the lawyer’s grate, and putting them between the bars, he poked them into the very hottest part of the fire, saying over his shoulder to Mr. Waters, with a somewhat doubtful smile, “ That is the safest deposit that I know, Waters.”

Waters looked on with a strong itching in his fingers to seize the other implement of pyrotechny, and rescue many a precious secret from the devouring flame. For a moment he consoled himself for not daring so to do, by the thought, “ Such a tight-tied packet as that will not easily burn ; a part will be unconsumed.”

But Mr. Forrest pertinaciously stirred, and restirred the fire, and thrust the poker between the sheets, till the whole fell out one black undistinguished mass, with nothing but some small red sparks wandering here and there over the destroyed fragments, like a few inhabitants

spared, and erring through the ruins of a city destroyed by some great convulsion of nature.

“And now,” said Mr. Forrest, taking his hat without sitting down again, “as it is already growing dusky, I will take my departure, and follow your advice to the letter. I am afraid, indeed, as it is, it may be dark before I reach the Hall; and as I do not know this country well, though born so near it, I may chance to lose my way.”

“Oh, sir, one of my people shall go with you,” said Mr. Waters; “by the short road the distance is not far. He will be ready in a minute. By leaving the village of Stalbrooke on the left, you know, and keeping under the park-walls, you save two miles.”

Mr. Forrest agreed to this proposal, the bell was rung, the groom made himself ready in all haste, and in a few minutes Mr. Forrest was once more on his horse, and on his way back to Mallory Hall. The light continued without any very sensible diminution for some way; and as they passed the prison, Mr. Forrest looked up with a feeling of vengeful satisfaction.

“ If he be condemned,” he said to himself, “ I will come down to see it with my own eyes.”

But could he have looked into the bosom of the person who sat solitary within those walls, and compared what he saw there, sad and gloomy as it was, with the state, the feelings, the dark writhings of his own spirit, the voice of conscience would have told him, “ It is thou that art punished ! ”

Bitter, painful, dark, and terrible, indeed, were the feelings of that unhappy man, as he rode onward : unsated revenge parched him like a thirst, hate rankled in his heart, fear dogged his footsteps ; and the gloomy night, as it fell, though it might be figuratively called congenial to the thoughts of his own heart, darkened without alleviating the sad and sombre impression on his mind. His way lay over a bleak lonely common, full of rushy pools and low stagnant pieces of water ; beyond was seen, through the dim air, the angle of a park-wall and some tall masses of trees ; and as they crossed on towards that point, the dull groom, who had not heard his name, rode up to Mr.

Forrest's side, and touching his elbow, said in an awed whisper, "That's where the young gentleman was killed."

A cold shudder passed over Mr. Forrest's frame; and, putting his horse into a quick pace, he tightened not the rein till he entered Mallory Park and approached the gates. The groom rode forward and rang the great bell. Mr. Forrest dismounted, and put a piece of money into the man's hands. The gates were then opened, and Mr. Forrest entered the court; but scarcely had he done so, when two men came out, one from either side; and one of them putting a strong hand upon his shoulder, said, "Ferdinand Forrest, I apprehend you, sir, in the king's name, on a charge of robbery."

CHAPTER XII.

WE must now turn to one of our principal characters, of whom, though we have spoken but little lately, we have not been unmindful; for it is absolutely necessary to bring her history up to the period at which we have now arrived, on various motives, which the reader probably divines.

The person we speak of is Lucy Williams, who, about the third hour after noon on an autumnal day, was walking slowly and meditatively along, shortly after her return to her father's cottage. She took her way through the Stalbrooke woods, intending, indeed, to proceed to the Castle before the day had closed, but filling up the time which had yet to elapse ere the hour arrived which had been appointed by Sir Andrew for seeing her.

A considerable change had come over the appearance of Lucy since we last presented

her to the reader. Her father's state of health, his embarrassed circumstances, his death, and all the painful events that accompanied that event so painful in itself, as well as all those which had followed, had all at that time diminished the appearance of bright warm health, which generally characterised both her face and person. That face, sparkling with hope and cheerfulness,—that form, all light activity, and buoyant grace,—seemed, on ordinary occasions, when no deep grief weighed her down, the express image and personification of unclouded life and hopefulness.

When we first placed her before the reader's eyes, the bright spirit within her was depressed, and languor weighed both upon her mind and her corporeal frame; and when last we spoke of her, she had not yet recovered from that state: but now the weight seemed to be taken off her mind. Health had returned in its full vigour, the bright eye shone as lustrously as ever, the graceful limbs moved free and unconfined, and the rose glowed warm in her cheek. It seemed, indeed, as if she

had been much exposed to the sun and atmosphere ; for her complexion, always somewhat brown, now seemed quite sunburnt ; and even her hands, which had been fair and beautiful, were at present as brown as a gleaner's. Nevertheless, though any ordinary eye that looked upon Lucy would merely have said that she looked very well, and seemed perfectly recovered and what she used to be ; yet those who looked more closely, and saw more deeply, might perceive that a change, a brightening change, had come over her within the last few days.

Before, she had been nothing but a beautiful, gay, clever, imaginative girl : but now, though not a sadness, there was a thoughtfulness in her face, there was a soul in her eyes, a depth of feeling, which had not been there before. Was it the touch of sorrow that had given this — that powerful, that magic touch, which so often sets the deepest chords of the heart vibrating, never to be wholly mute again ? Was it the feeling of strong love, which runs from every note, the highest to the lowest,

of the heart's diapason, and wakens them all into melody? Perhaps it was neither of these; for although it may be, that love and sorrow are the two greatest teachers of the human heart, calling forth its feelings, showing it its riches, and awakening its powers, — yet there be some other affections of the mind which, rousing the slumbering spirit to exertion, in a happy moment seat the ethereal being within us upon the throne in our bosoms, and give it power to rule over all inferior impulses.

However that may be, Lucy, to the eye of those who see in beauty something more than mere form and colouring, was far more beautiful than ever. Her face had all the freshness and the youthful grace it had before; but there was an expression of thoughtful power added to all the rest. Her limbs had all their symmetry, her movements all their grace: but there was a share of dignity pervaded all, which superadded another charm; and yet at heart she was as simple, as affectionate, as humble as ever she had been.

As she walked along, then, she thought of

one whom she loved well and truly, and she thought of him with hope and cheerfulness. The memory of her father, indeed, would cross her mind, and sadden her a little; but the buoyant spirit of youth rose up to shake off sorrow, and to speed her thoughts from the past, on into the future.

“He has not seen me,” she thought, “for several days; and when last I saw him, I could not but think that he did not seem well pleased at what I was doing, although he himself had consented. All men are strange beings, I do believe, and will often let us do things they blame us for when they are done.”

She smiled as she thus thought, and felt how much she loved him, for she could not find in her heart to blame even the little caprices of which she accused him.

“I hope I shall meet him here,” she thought; “and I think he generally comes back by the bank of the stream. He will be at Philippina’s to-night, I know; but I love to be with him better amongst the boughs, and banks, and dingles, and in the free fresh air, than in dull

rooms made with hands. People seem to love each other more and better under God's sky, than amongst stone walls. — Hark! he is coming; I hear his horse. I will surprise him." And stepping lightly through the underwood, she entered a path which ran, a yard or two above the bridle-road, along the wooded bank which flanked the stream; and there, hidden from all sight, gathered a bunch of late honeysuckle, to throw down in her lover's way as he passed by her. She paused, with her hand partly uplifted; but in a moment after, as she gazed, the hand dropped, she drew farther back, and crouched partly down, as if fearful of being seen; and then, with a light and silent step, moved on along the path, with the river on her left hand, while the horse's feet sounded slowly advancing by her side. Every now and then, glancing through the underwood, she fixed her eye eagerly on the traveller in the road below her, but still followed him on the path till he reached the second bridge, which we have had occasion to mention more than once. There, with anxious looks, and hands clasped

together, she watched the proceedings of the horseman through the branches.

“What is he going to do now?” she asked herself. “It was about this hour that he was to see my uncle. See, he is tying his horse. But hark! I hear another step coming down from the hill.—What are those papers in his hands, I wonder?—Hark, the steps are coming quick. It must be he. It must be he.” And darting away to the right, out of the wood, Lucy entered the road which turned up the hill, at a spot where its sharp windings hid her from any one in the neighbourhood of the stream below.

The moment that she issued forth from the brushwood, Castle Ball was before her, as she had expected, and not ten steps distant. He was walking on thoughtfully and rapidly; but his whole face gleamed with gladness when he saw her; and he was advancing with some joyful words hanging on his lips, when Lucy, starting forward, held up her finger, as beseeching silence, and, taking him eagerly by the hand, led him into the wood, to the spot where she had before

been standing. She would not venture even upon a whisper, and only feared that the sound of their feet might disturb the occupation of the person she had been gazing at. As soon as they were within sight, however, she pointed with her finger; and Castle Ball, looking in that direction, comprehended at once the cause of conduct which had seemed for a moment extraordinary.

The person on whom their eyes were now fixed was in the act of endeavouring to fasten a stone or some heavy substance to the packet of letters which he held in his hand. But in a moment after, he seemed to abandon this design; and, replacing the letters in his pocket, took out a small polished steel case, of about two palms breadths in length, and a palm in width, and not above an inch in thickness. This he gazed at for a moment, and then deliberately pitched it into what seemed to be the deepest part of the old mill-pool. It sank at once, of course, to the bottom; and of it, as of many another secret act, nothing remained upon the surface but a few bubbles.

Lucy had grasped Castle Ball's arm tight

while this was taking place ; and when it was done, she turned to him with a look full of agitation, and hid her eyes upon his shoulder.

“ What is it, Lucy ? ” he said, in a low tone :
“ What is the matter ? ”

“ Hush ! ” said Lucy, “ hush ! ” and she held up her hand as entreating silence, till the sound of the horse’s feet, which was heard again after a moment, began once more to die away.

“ Do you not remember, ” she then said, “ that I told you some time ago that I had engaged to do things which seemed strange to you, for a very great and a good purpose ; and though you told me that you would consent and help me, and watch over me, and trust to my bare word at once, I saw that you did not half like it, and had not half confidence in me —— ”

“ Nay, my dear Lucy, you do me wrong, ” replied Castle Ball, “ I had full confidence in you. I knew that Lucy would not do any thing of the kind, but for some very good and right reason. I was a little cross to be sure, the first time I met you, to see you look so un-

like yourself. But did not I help you, and do all I could to protect you? Was I not near you, I may say night and day? and did not I tell all the men scattered about to see that nobody hurt you, or molested you, or stopped you on your way? — But what has all that to do with this, Lucy?”

“I will tell you, Castle Ball,” said Lucy; “I will tell in you a moment, as far as I may tell you yet. There is a person in this world that I love very much — nay, not quite as well as you, Castle, and very differently. However, I would lay down my life to do him a kindness, or to make him happy ——”

“Do you mean Captain Strafford?” said Castle Ball, with the least bit of jealousy in the world creeping into his honest heart.

“No, Castle, no,” replied Lucy, smiling in his face, and reading all that was going on in his bosom, with a little affectionate malice. “No, I don’t mean Captain Strafford, though I would do a great deal to show my gratitude to him also. But you see I love a great number of people, Castle Ball; and for this one

that I mention, I would lay down my life at any time ——”

“ I know who you mean,” said Castle Ball.

“ Well,” continued Lucy; “ I was told that I might, and shown how I might, do him the greatest kindness that it was possible for any being to do; to add to his happiness more than any body could conceive; and to take away the only cloud that rested upon him. It was needful, however, to watch carefully every step; and before any thing was said, or our proceedings were at all seen, to make sure of a great number of different points, which, though known, could hardly be proved. Every thing succeeded till to-day: but upon that very little steel box that you have seen cast into the river, every thing depends. Something must have frightened that bad man: I was going to say somebody must have betrayed to him what we were about; only I know that nobody is acquainted with it fully, but myself and one other.”

“ Nothing is lost but what’s at the bottom of the sea,” replied Castle Ball, “ and a river’s not the sea, you know, Lucy. I will go up

directly to Sir Andrew, and ask him to have the pool of water drawn off and the nets put down, so as to prevent it from being carried away down into the other part of the stream."

"Oh no, no!" cried Lucy; "cannot we do it ourselves? The whole of this was given to me to do, that I might show my gratitude; and I would not have any other person do it for the world. It seems as if I had been sent here on purpose to see him throw it in."

"You and I, my dear girl!" exclaimed Castle Ball; "you and I draw that pond off! Impossible, Lucy; utterly impossible. You might as well talk of our drinking the whole stream. But I'll tell you what I can do: I can get up the men from the farm; but then I have no nets, and when the sluices are opened, the thing may be carried through into the other water below.

"But my uncle has nets," exclaimed Lucy; "my uncle has plenty of nets, I know. He is up there in the woods, not half a mile off; and the nets will be soon brought from his house. I will run down to the farm and tell your men

to come up, if you will go to my uncle and bring him down with the nets ; he will get it for us in a minute. I do not like to go myself for fear that hateful man should be with him still."

" Oh, I will go, Lucy," replied Castle Ball ; " but I do not like to part with you yet, Lucy." And asking her many a question, he kept her with him for a moment or two longer, toying kindly, affectionately, and not wrongly, with one that he loved truly, honourably, innocently. He then gave her directions as to which of his men she should bring, adding, with a smile, " Take care of the great dog and the old lady, Lucy."

" Oh the great dog knows me," replied Lucy, " and found me out when nobody else did ; and as for your mother, she sent me down this morning as kind a message as ever I could wish to have from the mother of Castle Ball. So I go without fear : but I shall not be happy, and always think that every thing we have done may yet go wrong, till I see that little casket once more upon dry land. Even then, perhaps,

the papers may be spoilt; for I suppose the contents are papers."

"Do you not know?" demanded Castle Ball, in some surprise.

"No," she answered, shaking her head, with a smile; "I am working in some degree in the dark. We women, you know, have more faith than you men. But let us lose no time." And away she ran; while Castle Ball, as we have shown, bent his way up the hill, and arrived at the close of Meakes's conversation with Mr. Forrest.

As soon as the lawyer and the rest were gone, the good farmer explained in a few words to Meakes what he wanted; and the old soldier listened with an air of deliberate wisdom, as some counsellor consulted on the fate of empires. He then looked up to the sky, pulled out his fat round watch, and gravely shook his head.

"You see, Castle Ball," he said, "I have got no nets here but this bit of a thing. It's a long way down to my house; will take us an hour and a half to get there, go as fast as we

will. Then your house is two miles off; Lucy wo'n't be up with the men for an hour. The only way on earth, if we had all the men and the nets here, that we could manage it, would be, to turn the stream round from above, by digging a trench down into the meadows while we draw off the pool. Otherwise we shall have it come pouring over the sluices upon us. In short, it will take us three or four hours, if the men were all here this minute. Before we've half done, it will be night; and then, in groping about, we are most likely to get the box jammed in amongst the sand, and mud, and stones, and never to see it again. You see an iron box doesn't go swimming about like a fish, so that we can see which way it takes in a minute."

"This is unfortunate, indeed," said Castle Ball. "But what you say is very true, Meakes; and I suppose we must put it off till to-morrow, though Lucy will be very sorry for that, poor girl."

"My grandmother used to say to me," said Meakes dogmatically, "'Never put off till to-

morrow what can be done to-day.' — Come, Castle Ball, I'm a free man now, and don't care to show my face to the sunshine. Come along, and let you and I see what can be done, without any help at all. When I get my fins in the water, you know, I can get my nose in the mud, like any carp; and after having taken to the bush for a week, I don't see why I shouldn't take to the water."

Thus saying, Meakes rolled up the net he had been working carefully, put it by into one of his leafy cupboards, and then walked slowly down with Ball towards the pool of the old mill, talking of how he used to dive when he was in this place and that place, and telling miraculous stories of bringing up pearl oysters from unaccountable depths in Indian seas; all of which, as he was a man of perfect veracity notwithstanding his little foibles, and certainly did very extraordinary things at different times, Castle Ball had not the slightest difficulty in believing.

When they reached the bank of the pool, it was still as solitary as Castle Ball had left it;

and standing on the plank that crossed the sluice, Meakes made his companion point out to him as accurately as possible the spot where the box had fallen.

“ It’s awkward,” said the old soldier coolly, “ that he threw it so far, for one has no place to plunge from. However, I must swim there ; and as it is not very deep, can get down to the bottom, I dare say, without a plunge. However, I shall put my clothes in the old mill, and you just keep your eye upon the road, to prevent any body but ourselves coming up, though I don’t think they will be here for this hour. — Coolish weather, Master Ball, for bathing in a mill-pond ; and if I remember right, there’s a cold spring comes in here.”

As he thus spoke, Meakes, who had been busily engaged in taking off his coat and waistcoat, walked round to the old mill, where he finished the rest of his unclothing ; and then appearing from the little trap-door which looked out upon the mill-wheel, like an otter out of its hole, he shot at once into the water.

“Hereabouts — wasn’t it?” he said, looking up, when he came near the spot which the farmer had pointed out. Ball nodded his head, and Meakes in a moment dived down and disappeared. After remaining so long under water that the good farmer began to be alarmed, the grey head of the old soldier again appeared above the pool; and after panting for a few moments, he said, “Desperate cold, Master Ball. I can’t find it, though; but if you were standing up on the bank there, it must have seemed to you to have gone in nearer than it really did. I will try it a couple of yards on, and then beat back.”

Thus saying, he swam a little farther, and then plunged again. This time, however, he did not stay so long beneath the water; but after a few moments re-appeared, exclaiming loudly, “A lame duck, a lame duck! the cramp, the cramp! — help me, help me, Ball!” and ere the sentence was well concluded, he sunk again beneath the surface of the pool.

Castle Ball was not a very expert or practised

swimmer; but he hesitated not a moment. Throwing off his coat and waistcoat, he plunged into the pool from the plank on which he stood, swam out, and by a great effort dived, though he had never tried it before. In a minute his strong hand came in contact with something like a human head. He caught it instantly by the hair, and sprang up, dragging it with him, feeling that Meakes still struggled in a degree and seconded him, but, with the extraordinary and peculiar presence of mind which the old soldier possessed, made not the slightest effort to lay hold of him.

In an instant the head was raised above the surface of the water, and striking for the meadows, the farmer reached them in safety, drawing Meakes after him. As soon as he landed himself, he stooped over and pulled the old soldier up upon the grass. By this time, however, he was motionless. But, to the surprise and not a little to the admiration of his companion, there, tight grasped in his right hand, the fingers of which had never relaxed their hold, even in the mortal struggle,

was the small steel case which Forrest had cast into the pool.

The first care of Castle Ball, however, was for his companion, and natural good sense supplied the place of information. He put his hand to his heart, he felt it flutter faintly, but distinctly still, and he applied himself with eager zeal to restore vital warmth, and give vigour to the circulation. Rubbing the body dry, as well as he could, with the clothes which had been cast off, he continued the friction over the chest and arms, till he felt a glow begin to return. The sun, as if to second his endeavours, came out from behind some clouds that had obscured him, and shone down the stream upon the meadow, and covering Meakes up from the wind as well as he could, the good farmer continued to use all means that suggested themselves, and not without success; till at length the glad sound of voices came upon his ear; and turning his head to look down the stream, he saw Lucy and his own men coming up from the farm.

Scarcely could the son of Thetis, calling

from the trenches, have uttered a louder shout than did Castle Ball to hasten their progress towards him. But that shout seemed to have more effect upon Meakes himself, than upon those to whom it was addressed. The half-drowned man opened his eyes, and gazed with some sort of speculation in them upon the face of the farmer. Animation had not been so entirely suspended, indeed, as completely to blot out for the time—which is sometimes the case—the memory of the accident, and the circumstances in which it took place.

“A near go, Castle Ball,” murmured Meakes; “that cramp legged me so, that I could do nothing. How did you get me out? Where’s the box? Oh here, in my hand. I wouldn’t have lost that for something. It would have been a job to have to go in again to-night.”

Ball shook him heartily by the wounded hand, exclaiming, “Thank God, Meakes; thank God! Your tongue is the gladdest sound I have heard for a long time.”

“Why, did you think I was dead?” said

Meakes in a faint voice, but still in his old gay tone. "Oh no! I am like an eel; I take a great deal of killing. I felt you all the time scrubbing away with your great hands upon my chest, just as my old cook scrubs the bars of the grate with emery paper. I don't so well remember how you got me out though. But here come all the people. Hang it, man, go and tell Lucy or she'll be frightened, poor girl. She never saw her uncle lying on the bank like a sick sparrow before. Tell her it's nothing. There, give her the box too, and send her away."

Lucy, however, was not so easily satisfied. Her heart had failed her at Castle Ball's shout, she knew not well why; and now she listened with anxiety and apprehension, while the rest of the people went forward to assist Meakes, and the good farmer related to her all that had occurred.

"I must go to him," she said, "I must go to him;" and running forward as soon as she had heard the whole, she came up to her uncle just as the people, having wrapped him up in

what warm clothing they could muster, were carrying him down to the nearest house.

All the terror and apprehension which the poor girl still felt, all her anxiety about him, which was spoken by her manner as much as by her words, were not without their effect upon the old soldier. Though he bade her not be a fool and be frightened, he assured her that he could walk quite well if the people would let him, but if they chose to be foolish enough to carry him, it was their fault not his; and he more than once begged her to go back, as he knew very well that she was going up to the Castle.

Lucy, however, persevered, and accompanied her uncle to the nearest house, which happened to be that of one of Sir Andrew's gamekeepers. There, however, no power could induce Meakes to suffer the people to put him to bed, which was an indignity that he had never endured in the whole course of his campaigning; and on their attempting to do so against his will, he vowed that he would soon show them whether he was drowned or not,

giving one of the labourers a push which sent him reeling to the other side of the cottage. Wrapping himself up in a blanket till dry clothes could be procured from his own house, he applied himself to get into a glow, as he called it, by drinking two or three large glasses of weak brandy and water, which was his own peculiar panacea for all illnesses; and by the time that his clothes arrived he was as well as ever, and only the more inclined to exertion, in order to show that he was not in the slightest degree the worse for the accident which had taken place.

Although it was now growing quite dark he declared, most positively, that he would accompany Castle Ball and his niece up to Stalbrooke Castle; and on Lucy endeavouring to persuade him not to do so, he laughed at her fears, and silenced her objections by demanding what they could all do without him.

“ You know very well, Lucy,” he said, “ the whole thing would break down but for me; and if I had stuck at the bottom of the pond, you would have been worse off than if the box had

stuck there without me. So you may thank Castle Ball for bringing us both up."

Finding that it was vain to contend with him, they suffered him to do as he pleased, and set off for the Castle before they would willingly have done so. He walked as stoutly, however, as before, and on their arrival vowed that he was all the better and the warmer for the march. A disappointment, however, awaited them. As they came near the gates they thought they heard the sound of carriages going down the hill, and on entering the court the first salutation that met them was from the old major domo, who exclaimed, "God bless my soul! here you are at length, and master's just been obliged to go away without you. He was very anxious indeed, Miss Lucy, and wondered what could prevent you from coming. He thought Mr. Meakes, too, would have come, and asked several times if he had not been here in the course of the day."

"Why! how the deuce could I come?" exclaimed Meakes, "when I was drowned."

The servant took a step back.

“ Ay, you need not look so astonished,” said Meakes; “ drowned I say. My life has been like a beggar’s shirt to-day; I’ve taken it off, washed it in the pond, and put it on again. But what are we to do next, I wonder?”

CHAPTER XIII.

THE first grasp of the officer's hand upon Mr. Forrest's shoulder seemed to change the whole blood in his veins to marble. His dark and bitter heart refused to beat, and he had well nigh dropped upon the pavement of the court. The man's words, however, caused his heart to beat, and his blood to flow again with something — though strangely mingled with other feelings — like honest indignation.

“ On a charge of robbery ! ” he exclaimed. “ Sir, this is absurd — ridiculous ! You or your employers must be playing off some mad joke upon me ! ”

“ I rather believe, sir, ” replied the man drily, “ that you will find it no joke. But all I know of the matter is, that I have a warrant to apprehend you upon that charge, and that the magistrates have been for some time sitting in the library in expectation of your return.”

Mr. Forrest put his hand to his brow thoughtfully, as if asking himself what could be the meaning of such a charge; and then exclaiming once more, "It is ridiculous!" he added, "Who are these gentlemen? I am ready to appear before them at once."

"Such is what they require, sir," replied the man. "Will you come with me?"

Conducted by the one officer and followed by the other, Mr. Forrest accordingly entered the house amidst groups of gaping domestics, and with a heart in which bitter wrath struggled with some indefinite apprehensions, passed on to the library.

It was a large antique chamber, the tall roof of which was supported by two massy square pillars, towards that end which had an entrance from the hall; and as the first officer entered the room, leaving his prisoner in charge of the second, and surrounded by a number of the servants, who had followed from the outer hall "to see how he looked," Mr. Forrest perceived a glare of much light, and heard the confused talking of many voices. In a moment

after the officer returned, the voices within were silent, and the prisoner was directed to advance.

A great number of persons were present, but the principal group was seated on the opposite side of a large square library-table, with manifold lights and papers before them. In the centre was Sir Arthur Brotherton, with another magistrate, and Sir Andrew Stalbrooke. The two lawyers, who were for the time on a visit to Stalbrooke Castle, were there likewise; and several clerks, together with another solicitor, who had been brought from a small town at some distance, made up the group. The rest of the persons in the room consisted of Mr. Forrest's own servants and of several people whom he did not know, and upon whom, seeing them to be, of what he considered the common herd, he did not condescend to cast his eyes. He was of course agitated; but feeling that he had but one course to pursue, he advanced towards the table with a firm step, and a frowning and imperious brow.

“Place me a chair,” he said to one of his

servants upon whom his eye fell, and leaning his arm upon the table, he seated himself slowly, demanding aloud, "What is the meaning of all this, gentlemen?"

"This is the personage, I take it for granted," said Sir Arthur Brotherton, in a quiet unmoved tone.

Sir Andrew Stalbrooke nodded his head: then rising, he left his chair vacant, and after pausing for a moment by the fire, quitted the room.

"Your name, sir," proceeded Sir Arthur, "is, I think, Ferdinand Forrest." And he looked between the lights full in the face of the prisoner.

"It is, sir," replied Mr. Forrest; "and the personage, as you are pleased to call me, will be extremely glad to know what business you can have with so humble an individual as Ferdinand Forrest."

"You shall know instantly, sir," answered the magistrate; "but first let me inform you that my name is Sir Arthur Brotherton, one of the justices of the peace for this county, as is

also this learned and very respectable gentleman on my right, Mr. Pasterton."

"And Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, I suppose," interrupted Mr. Forrest.

"No," answered the magistrate, "Sir Andrew on the present occasion does not choose to act."

"He has acted, I suppose, sufficiently for his purpose already," replied Mr. Forrest; "whatever the business may be, it is evidently prejudged."

"Your pardon, sir," replied Sir Arthur Brotherton; "we excuse a little irritation circumstanced as you are; but perhaps, upon reflection, you may think fit to abstain from such observations. The matter has not been in any degree prejudged; no witnesses have been examined, that they might be examined in your presence; and the only thing that has taken place, is the charge of robbery brought against you, which of course required immediate investigation, and from which, we trust, you will speedily clear yourself. It was, of course, necessary to issue a warrant for your apprehension;

and in the hope that something would appear which would save us the painful necessity of either remanding or committing you, we have determined to enter into the affair at once. Let the prosecutrix be brought forward."

As he spoke, there was a little movement amongst the people who stood behind Mr. Forrest; and the woman, whom we introduced to the reader's notice in the first chapter of this book, called Philippina, came round to the opposite side of the table, and stood exactly fronting the prisoner, with her large black eyes glaring upon him with evident marks of dislike and animosity. At her sudden appearance, Mr. Forrest rose partly off his chair, and then as suddenly sat down again; while Sir Arthur Brotherton whispered a word to Mr. Pasterton, who instantly raised his eyes to the prisoner's countenance, and saw that he had not only turned pale, but absolutely livid.

"What is your name?" demanded Sir Arthur Brotherton, addressing Philippina.

"My name," answered the woman, "is Philippina Meerbach, by birth a Hungarian."

“ You will be so good as to state the charge which you made before me some time ago,” continued Sir Arthur ; “ and remember, that as the charge is very serious, affecting perhaps the life of an individual of apparently high respectability, it is necessary to be extremely cautious and guarded, recollecting that for the truth of every word which you shall this day pronounce, you are answerable to God and man.”

Philippina bowed her head, and then clearly and distinctly proceeded : “ I am ready,” she said, “ to swear, that the gentleman before you, who now calls himself Forrest, did, on one Friday in the month of August 17—, come to my house where I was then living, having married and come into the bishopric of Wurtzburg, and there took out of my possession a small Vienna case made of steel, and containing several papers ; besides which, there were in it four rings of gold, and different stones, a pair of ear-rings, and a small gold cross.”

“ Do you mean to say,” demanded Sir Arthur Brotherton, “ that he took this case

against your will, or did you give it to him?"

"I showed it to him, and the papers that were in it," replied the woman, "and he asked me to let him have them to show to his wife. I said No, he should not, for I would not part with them to any body. He said he would write me down a receipt for them, and a promise to give them to me back again, and taking up a pen that was upon the table, he wrote that receipt and promise; but while he wrote, I thought more than ever I would not let him have them, and when he had done, I told him so. He then said that was nonsense, and that he would have them whether I liked or not. So saying, he snatched the box out of my hand, and walked away laughing, telling me that I was very foolish to be afraid, and that if I would send to his house the next day, I should have the box. I could not stop him, for I was a poor woman, and alone in the house; but as I saw that he had shut to the box, which had a spring lock, and I had the key, I thought he would be obliged to come to me to open it. As soon as I could

on the day after, however, I went to his house, which lay further up the river, and I found that he and all his people had been gone since sunrise."

"Woman, you are a liar!" cried Forrest; but Sir Arthur Brotherton waved his hand for silence, and went on to ask, "Had you at that time ever seen Mr. Forrest before?"

"Yes," she replied, "frequently; for more than a month before."

"And have you ever seen him since?"

"Never till within the last fortnight," she replied; "since then I have seen him several times."

"And are you perfectly sure," said Mr. Pasterton, "of the identity of this gentleman with the person who took the box? Remember it is more than twenty years ago, according to your own account."

"It does not signify," she replied, "I will swear it is the same man; every line of his face is stamped upon my memory with the anger, and indignation, and heart-burning, and remorse of twenty years."

After a little pause, Sir Arthur Brotherton observed, "You told us that he wrote a paper promising to return the box. Did he take that paper away, or leave it with you?"

"He left it with me," replied the woman, "and there it is." And taking forth a piece of written paper, yellow with long keeping, she handed it to the magistrates.

"I beg your pardon for interrupting you, gentlemen," exclaimed Mr. Forrest, "but I think it is time that I should be heard."

"Not before the charge is complete," answered Sir Arthur Brotherton. "After this good lady has made her statement, you shall have the option, sir, of saying any thing that you like, and undergoing examination, or waiting till all the other witnesses have been examined in your presence. But if you would permit me to advise, you would pursue the latter course, and hear the depositions against you, in order that you may judge whether it is right to say any thing at all, or to remain silent."

"What I have to say now, sir," answered

Mr. Forrest, "refers in no degree to my defence against a false accusation, but to your competence to enter into the matter at all. The offence charged being upwards of twenty years ago, I hold to be without your cognisance altogether, and that the very warrant which you have issued against me is in itself illegal."

The magistrates looked a little surprised and perplexed; but Sir Frederick Polaxe said, "No, no, that is a mistake. The woman, I think, in her first charge, accuses the prisoner not only of taking, but of retaining possession of the article taken, which is in itself a taking, and brings it within the period at which any court can take notice of the offence."

Mr. Forrest gnashed his teeth; and the magistrates, turning once more to Philippina, demanded whether she persisted in her statement that the prisoner still retained possession of the case she mentioned. She replied at once that she did, and that she had seen it in his possession since he had been at Mallory Hall.

A sarcastic smile came over the face of Mr.

Forrest when he heard this statement; but he said nothing; and Mr. Pasterton, looking at the paper which Philippina had handed to the magistrates, remarked — “ This paper is not signed by any body of the name of Forrest: the name here affixed is Mason.”

“ Ay,” exclaimed Philippina, “ that is the name that he went by then, and I can swear that he is the same man. His wife, too, could tell that he then went by that name.”

“ I’m afraid that is evidence that we could not admit here,” said Sir Arthur Brotherton. “ Is there nobody else who you think could prove his identity, for twenty years is a long time? The appearance of this gentleman must have very much changed, and we really think that your solitary recollection will scarcely be sufficient for us to decide upon. Do you know any body else that remembers him, and can swear to his having borne the name of Mason?”

“ I do,” she answered, looking round the room; “ but unfortunately he is not here as he should have been. Perhaps Lady Mallory can tell though, for I have heard that she was a girl

at that time, living with her uncle and his, Sir William Forrest."

"Let somebody give our compliments to Lady Mallory," said Sir Arthur Brotherton, "and beg the favour of her presence for a few minutes."

One of the servants of the house went to convey this message to his mistress, who appeared shortly after. She was calm, but very pale, and advanced with her usual dignity towards the table, bowing to the magistrates, who rose to receive her. A seat was placed for her near the table; and Sir Arthur Brotherton briefly apologising for troubling her, begged her to state if she could recollect events which took place at a period of twenty years before.

"I am afraid I can, Sir Arthur," she replied with a faint smile: "I was then living with my uncle, Sir William Forrest, and eight years old."

"Pray, have you any recollection, Lady Mallory," continued the magistrate, "of your cousin here present having ever been known by the name of Mason?"

“Certainly not,” replied Lady Mallory; “I never knew him but as Ferdinand Forrest. He was at that time, however, abroad in Germany, having married some short time before; and on my uncle refusing to increase his income, he went abroad, giving out his intention of taking a commission in some foreign service. But I never heard of his having changed his name.”

“That is quite sufficient, Lady Mallory,” replied the magistrate; “and if you wish to retire, we will not detain you further.”

“If it be not improper for me to do so,” replied Lady Mallory, “I would fain hear the further proceedings, for of course all this business makes me anxious and apprehensive.”

The magistrates immediately signified their assent to her staying; and removing to some small distance from the table, she continued to listen to the proceedings, while Sir Arthur Brotherton went on saying to Philippina, “You hear Lady Mallory can give no confirmation in regard to this gentleman having ever gone by another name.”

“Yes,” exclaimed Philippina; “but she proves that he was in Germany at that very time.”

“Have you any thing else to say?” demanded the magistrate.

Philippina looked round the room anxiously, but then replied, “No, I have not; I have told the truth though, and I will swear positively that he is the same man.”

“Now, Mr. Forrest,” said Sir Arthur Brotherton, “it will be necessary of course to make farther investigations into this charge; and the only question for the present is, whether we should remand you, or leave you at liberty, till some more conclusive proofs are brought forward. It is for you to say any thing or not in this stage of the proceedings as you like. Perhaps, if you have any thing to say, it may affect our decision, and enable us, as we willingly would do, to put you to little farther inconvenience.”

“It seems to me, sir,” replied Mr. Forrest, “that as far as the matter goes at present, no defence is required on my part, there being

not the shadow of a case against me. Here is a woman, the servant, as I gather, of Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, a gentleman at enmity with myself, who swears to the identity of a person that she has not seen for twenty years, in a manner which you yourselves must admit bears but slight signs of veracity; and this is all. I shall not, therefore, enter into any defence of myself on so absurd, vague, and unfounded an accusation, a matter, indeed, quite contemptible. But I will make a few comments upon the case as it now stands, to which I will beg your unprejudiced attention. Suppose, gentlemen, that two persons being at enmity together, and one being an enforced and unwilling guest in the house of the other, in consequence of an accident which confined him to his bed — suppose, I say, that it became necessary, for particular purposes, to manufacture an accusation against this unfortunate stranger, how easy would it be, by imagining events to have taken place in a foreign country twenty years before, and by getting an abject dependant to swear to them, — how easy, I say, would it be, by doing this — if

English magistrates were fools or villains — to remove an obnoxious person from taking an active part in proceedings disagreeable to his adversary! I dare say, gentlemen, that you must understand my allusion.”

Sir Arthur Brotherton bowed his head, and was about to say something in reply; but Mr. Forrest proceeded before the other could speak: “How easy would it be even,” he continued, thinking of Meakes, and what had passed between them in the morning, “how easy would it be even to suborn two or three disreputable characters to swear to facts for the same purposes; ay! and with the skill of the patriarch Joseph, to place a talent of stolen silver, or any other thing, in the baggage of a somewhat careless man! Now, gentlemen, without the slightest hesitation, I acknowledge that I was in Germany twenty years ago, with my wife and family. It is a thing about which there has never been any concealment at all — ”

“Will you allow me to remind you,” said Sir Arthur Brotherton, “that you are now entering upon a sort of defence which may perhaps affect you afterwards, and which you may regret?”

“Not so, sir, not so,” replied Mr. Forrest, gaining confidence as he went on. “It matters not. Feeling myself perfectly innocent I shall not scruple to expose the infamy of this whole transaction. I say that it is well known to every body that I was in Germany twenty years ago, and this is the whole foundation for the charge; but, although it is very customary in travelling, during war-time, to assume a fictitious name, I deny that such was the case at that time, though, indeed, it would not have surprised me at all to have found that this good woman, who is evidently the tool of other parties, had provided herself with other witnesses as respectable as herself, to prove that my name is Mason and not Forrest. I deny, also, that I have, or ever have had, any such box as that which she mentions. Let every search be made here and at my house in London. But, pray, bind her down carefully to her account of this wonderful box, otherwise she may fix upon any thing in my dressing-case and declare that that is stolen. I say, let instant search be made.”

“It shall, sir,” replied Sir Arthur Brotherton, dryly. “Let every thing be brought down immediately, officers, from the room occupied by Mr. Forrest, and strict search be made for the articles described by the witness, Philippina. You will be so good, madam,” he continued, turning to Philippina, “to enter into a more detailed description of the box you mention; which done, we shall proceed to another part of the case.”

Philippina, accordingly, gave a minute description of the box, which we have already described; and this having been taken down by the clerk, Sir Arthur Brotherton once more turned to Mr. Forrest, saying, “It was not without warning, sir, that you made the statement which you did concerning your not having assumed, twenty years ago, the name of Mason. If I am rightly informed, there are persons who can give evidence upon that subject, and they are now in the room.”

Mr. Forrest turned his head suddenly round, and gazed over the people who were standing behind him, expecting to see the countenance

of Meakes. But no such person was there. Instead, however, there stepped forth the three persons whom we have seen with Meakes that morning in the wood, immediately after Mr. Forrest's conversation with the old soldier, and each of them, clearly and distinctly, deposed to what had taken place on that occasion; and to Mr. Forrest's having not only acknowledged, but proved to Meakes's satisfaction, that he was the identical person he had known in Germany under the name of Mason.

Mr. Forrest's face fell, and he sat gloomily, and thoughtfully, looking upon the ground; but before these witnesses had made their statement, he had arranged his plan, and the officers having brought down various articles from his room, had demanded his keys and opened the dressing-case. The box, as he expected, was not to be found, and every perquisition was made in vain.

Philippina, on her part, looked utterly confounded, while the officers distinctly declared that they could find nothing throughout the whole baggage of Mr. Forrest at all resembling

the steel case she had mentioned. Mr. Forrest kept a profound silence while this was going on, and suffered a momentary pause to take place afterwards, while the magistrates looked in each other's faces, as if asking how they were to proceed.

He then said, however, "With regard to my persuading the man called Meakes — or rather falling into the trap laid for me, to make me persuade him — that I had once borne the name of Mason, I will distinctly acknowledge that I had strong motives for so doing, totally unconnected with this case; but as these motives might suffer a wrong construction, I shall not explain them. This box, or case, or whatever it is that the woman mentions, has not been found, and I think, even according to the opinion of the very learned lawyer, who decided that the case was within your cognisance, it must be proved that the thing said to have been taken by me was still in my possession."

"Not exactly that, not exactly that," said the counsellor; "but I must confess that the proofs of its having been in your possession

within the necessary time do not seem satisfactory."

"I can swear that I have seen it in his possession within these four days," exclaimed Philippina vehemently.

"Woman, you are perjured!" said Mr. Forrest, assuming the air of stern rebuke.

"Hush!" said Sir Arthur Brotherton; "we must have silence, and the authority of the magistrates must be respected. It would certainly seem to me that we have not a sufficient case made out in the present instance. In all matters of this kind where the testimony is at all doubtful, we require some reasonable cause to be assigned as an incentive to the crime charged: there is none appears before us; and perhaps, even had the steel case itself been found in Mr. Forrest's possession, we should have required explanations on that head, before we had ventured either to commit or remand him. The matter is an extraordinary one; and we must take his respectable rank in society, and fair repute, into consideration. The very object alleged to have been taken—the steel case, con-

taining papers, jewels, &c. — has not been produced, and ——”

While he had been speaking, the door at the other end of the room had opened, and some persons had entered. Before he had done, a girl in deep mourning, followed by two other persons, advanced to the table; and Lucy Williams, with a trembling and agitated air, laid down upon the table before the magistrates the very box which had been so long sought for.

“ Pray what is this, my young lady?” demanded Sir Arthur Brotherton.

“ That,” exclaimed Philippina eagerly, “ that ——”

“ Silence!” thundered the magistrate: “ I ask you, young lady, and nobody but you. What is this which you have laid down before me, and where did you get it?”

“ That, sir,” replied Lucy, in a clear but low voice, “ is a small iron box, which I saw the gentleman sitting in that chair, called Mr. Forrest, throw into the middle of the deep pond called Harlay Mill-pond, this day, as near as I can guess, about three o’clock.”

“ Pray did any body else see him throw it in ? ” demanded the magistrate.

“ Yes, sir, ” replied Lucy, “ Farmer Ball, whom I called to see what was taking place. ”

Mr. Forrest started from his seat. “ False, lying, deceiving girl, ” he cried vehemently, before any body could stop him ; “ doubtless, if you dare to perjure yourself, you can be backed by one of your paramours. ”

“ By my promised husband, sir, ” replied Lucy, turning full upon him.

“ Ay, madam, ay ; I know the price of all your services, ” exclaimed Mr. Forrest ; “ but I will expose you thoroughly. Pray what were you doing at the time ? — what were you doing in those dark woods ? — how happened you to call this Farmer Ball to see me throw any thing into the pond, when you could not tell what I was about to do, or whether what I was going to throw in was valuable or not, unless you had been tutored — primed, I believe it is called — to fabricate this pretty story, and produce it at the hour of need ? ”

Lucy’s spirit was aroused, and she replied

at once, "I will tell you what I was doing, sir, in a single minute; without the least hesitation I will answer every question. I was going to Stalbrooke Castle at the time I saw you. I had first to see my uncle, who stands here beside me, and who was then in the chase; and I was going to Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, to tell him more than he already knows of your former life and history ——"

"Of mine?" exclaimed Mr. Forrest. "Of mine! What can you know of mine?"

"Much," replied Lucy, with the same calm boldness; "but that will be told you by my answer to your second question. I have now answered you what I was doing in those woods, and where I was going to. What made me call others to witness your proceedings was this ——" She looked at Philippina, as if asking permission. "Yes, yes," cried the German, "tell all, tell the whole truth, even if it be to my shame."

"Well, then," said Lucy, turning to the magistrates, "it is to you, gentlemen, I suppose I must speak, not to this person. I had heard,

— shortly after he arrived in this country, and when he was lying ill in Stalbrooke Castle, after having been hurt by a stag in the park, — I had heard that he had committed a gross and terrible injury, many years ago, against the very man under whose roof he then was — noble Sir Andrew Stalbrooke. These tidings were told me by Philippina here present, whom weak apprehensions had rendered in some degree subservient to this man's crime. When she told it me, she besought me to assist her, in the particular way she wanted, in order to repair completely the evil she had done, to expose the criminal, and, at the risk of much blame to herself, if her suspicions — suspicions, do I call them? — if her hopes, proved correct, to restore happiness to one who is a benefactor to all around him. I promised to do all that she would, if she promised to let me be entirely the instrument of giving happiness to Sir Andrew Stalbrooke; for if he had been a benefactor to others, what had he not been to me? We took our measures; we followed one course for discovering all: we got proofs, clear proofs,

of the man's guilt; but the clearest of all proofs was this box of papers and trinkets. We were obliged to communicate a part at length to Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, which awakened doubts, and, I believe, even awakened hopes. Every thing was arranged for causing an examination into the whole affair, as soon as my uncle had found means to make him, who now sits there, acknowledge, in the hearing of witnesses, that he had gone by the name of Mason. When I suddenly saw him by the bank of the stream, I knew that he was going to my uncle, and that there were witnesses concealed waiting his arrival, so that I might have taken no further notice; but I remarked that from time to time he paused, and looked eagerly at the stream. An apprehension, of I know not what, came over me, which made me follow him by the path, half way up the bank; and when I saw him alight, tie his horse, and approach the mill-pool, I felt sure that he was about some evil. A terror seized me, lest all our labour should be lost; and hearing steps approaching, I ran out the other way, and brought a witness

to observe his actions as well as myself. We then saw him replace some papers in his pocket, which he had seemed about to throw into the water; and taking out the case, on which all depended, cast it into the deepest part of the pool. It was brought out afterwards, nearly at the expense of my uncle's life; and though I was not present, here is one who was, and can tell you how it was found."

Mr. Forrest, though pale as death, and agitated in every limb, with his hands grasping his knees convulsively, and his lip quivering in the agony of detection, once more raised himself, exclaiming, "I claim to be heard; I would desire to be heard!"

"Really if you would take my advice, sir," said Mr. Pasterton, "you would say as little as possible. Let me point out to you how you have committed yourself already, by what you have said. You have declared that you never went by the name of Mason; and it is proved, that on the very same day you have acknowledged, in the most solemn manner, that you did so in Germany, at the very time spoken of.

You have also shown clearly that you are perfectly well acquainted with the woods, and with the spot where it is deposed that you threw this box into the water, leaving the strongest impression upon the mind of the magistrates, that you must have been there lately, in circumstances very similar to those urged against you. Let the witnesses speak first, as we have already proceeded so far with our depositions, and then say what you will afterwards."

Mr. Forrest sat down and covered his eyes with his hands; and Castle Ball proceeded to give his evidence, confirming all that Lucy had said. Meakes followed; but we must not pause to give the exact words of either.

"It only remains to be seen," said Sir Arthur Brotherton, "whether the box does or does not contain the articles supposed to be therein."

"Stay, stay! In pity stay!" cried Mr. Forrest, starting up once more, but with consternation evidently overcoming every other feeling in his bosom. "I must, indeed, be heard. — Tell me, woman," he said, addressing Philippina, "does Sir Andrew Stalbrooke know all? Have you told him all?"

“No, not all,” replied Philippina; “he may suspect, he does suspect, but he does not know the whole. He only knows, as a certainty, that you took from me the papers and trinkets of his dead wife. But I tell you, cruel man, that nature speaks out in his heart, which it never did in yours, and he suspects that of which he is not sure.”

“Let me speak with him, then!” exclaimed Mr. Forrest, eagerly. “Let me speak with him, if it be but two words.”

The magistrates looked in each other’s faces inquiringly. “Let it be so,” said Sir Arthur Brotherton, at length. “Some one call Sir Andrew Stalbrooke.”

“I passed him in the next room,” said Lady Mallory, “as I came in, and he is evidently much agitated.”

A servant went to call him; and Sir Andrew entered the room with a quick pace, gazing eagerly and inquiringly at the circle around. His countenance, usually so full of a healthy glow, was now very pale, and his calm eye anxious. His first look was towards the ma-

gistrates, as he approached the table; but, in another instant, his eye fell upon the small steel case; and he laid his finger firmly upon it, saying, "That is mine!"

"Let me speak with him — let me speak with him," cried Mr. Forrest, in a voice full of painful apprehension.

Sir Andrew Brotherton bowed his head and pointed to Mr. Forrest, explaining briefly to Sir Andrew his request. Sir Andrew gazed at him for a moment; and even the kindness of his heart, and the courtesy of his nature, could not prevent a stern frown from gathering upon his brow. In a single instant, however, it passed away; and bowing with calm gravity to Mr. Forrest, he advanced a few steps down the hall, to give him an opportunity of speaking to him in private, saying to him, "I am your listener, sir."

With a trembling and ill-assured step, Mr. Forrest followed him, and was then seen speaking with him in a low but evidently an eager voice. The changes that came over the faces of both were rapid and striking. Sir Andrew,

greatly affected and agitated, carried his hand to his brow, and pressed it there for several moments, while the other went on; then drew forth his handkerchief and wiped away some tears. Mr. Forrest, bent low before him, kept his eyes most frequently on the ground, even while he spoke; but sometimes raised them earnestly to the noble countenance of his listener, and clasped his two hands together, as if he were beseeching earnestly.

Thus it went on for some time; till at length Sir Andrew exclaimed, "No, sir, no, it cannot be! Any thing on earth, for myself, that you please! For an object so mighty to my heart and spirit I will not easily reject your demand. But as to Lady Mallory, I can neither promise for her any thing, nor ask her any thing. She has suffered much already in this business."

Mr. Forrest clasped his hands again, and was once more going on as if to urge his suit by explanations. But the words of Sir Andrew Stalbrooke had been spoken aloud, and were overheard; and Lady Mallory, rising from her

seat, moved through the hall towards them. Sir Andrew held out his hand to her, saying, "Do not, dear lady, do not interfere — I know your generosity."

Lady Mallory, however, slightly pressed the hand that Sir Andrew had held out to her. "Is there any thing, dear friend," she said, "that I would not do for you? Is there any thing that may serve you, that will not be a real happiness to me to do? — Ferdinand," she continued, turning to Mr. Forrest, "whatever it was that you asked Sir Andrew Stalbrooke to promise on my part, a moment ago, I promise you."

"Can you be so generous, Isabella?" demanded Mr. Forrest.

"I would always have been generous towards you, Ferdinand," she said, "if you would have let me. You have wronged me, I know; — you have wronged others, I am led to believe, still more deeply than me. Make full and instant atonement to them, and I promise you to say nothing, believing that the motives which have led you to all that you have done are known to

me alone, and that it was to wrong me with impunity that you have ventured so terribly to wrong others."

"Thanks, dear lady, thanks," said Sir Andrew.

Lady Mallory shook her head with a melancholy sigh, and returned to her seat.

"I have your promise too," said Mr. Forrest, turning to Sir Andrew.

"You have," answered the baronet; and he returned towards the table, slowly followed by Mr. Forrest. "Gentlemen," he said, addressing the magistrates, "I have promised, in consideration of Mr. Forrest restoring to me all that is mine, to proceed myself no farther in this business. The little casket upon the table is my property. It was certainly taken from this good person, Philippina; but still she well knows that it is mine; and I must decline to proceed, on condition that he fulfils instantly what he has just promised me."

"I have your promise also, Isabella," said Mr. Forrest.

"That I will in no degree take advantage

of whatever admissions you may make," replied Lady Mallory, bowing her head.

"Well then," said Mr. Forrest, with a faltering voice, and a downcast look, "that box, I believe, for I have never opened it since I first had it, contains the certificate of the marriage of Sir Andrew Stalbrooke with a Protestant lady in Germany; and also, besides some jewels belonging to her, the certificate of the birth of his daughter, Edith Stalbrooke, who has always hitherto passed for mine."

A murmur of surprise ran through those that heard; and even the servants pressed forward to hear, in eager expectation. Mr. Forrest looked round, annoyed by their near approach; but his spirit was subdued, and he went on — "It matters not why, but it was necessary to my prospects, that I should be able to bring to England at that time a living child of my own. The girl which my wife had borne me died a few days after its birth, while she lay dangerously ill. I remarked a beautiful infant, not much older than my own would have been, and found that its father, an English gentleman,

had left its mother suddenly a few weeks before her confinement, and had promised to return with speed. He had never come back. The mother died; the child was saved, and was in the charge of a poor woman, a soldier's widow, who had attended the lady as her nurse. No tidings had been heard of the father ——”

Mr. Forrest paused, and perhaps even at that moment he would willingly have left the conduct of Sir Andrew Stalbrooke unexplained, in order that a shade might rest upon a man he hated; but he so well knew that an explanation would soon be given, that he assumed candour, though he had it not. “I have heard since,” he continued, “that the father of the child was taken prisoner on his way over to see a dying parent; and that, in the confused state of the Continent at that time, none but one letter written by him to his wife ever reached its destination.”

“Were you yourself aware, at the time,” demanded Sir Arthur Brotherton, “that the father of the child was living, and a prisoner?”

“On my life, on my soul, I was not!”

replied Mr. Forrest, vehemently. "Think not my conduct worse than it was! — I saw a child abandoned, as it seemed to me; — to speak plainly, I had tidings that my uncle was at the point of death; — if he died without my having a living child, his inheritance went away. No time was to be lost — no choice seemed left me. I told the woman that the father had certainly abandoned the child. She had not means to support it, for she had scarcely means to support herself. The enemy occupied all the country between her and England, whither she talked of begging her way on foot; and I offered to adopt the infant, to educate it as my own; promising, however, if ever I met with its father, to restore it to him. She pondered long, and, to do her but justice, she wept much, ere she consented. At length, however, necessity prevailed; and she did what she judged best for the infant. It was needful, however, that I should remove all proofs of the real birth; and I obtained those papers much as she has stated. — Hear me, gentlemen, hear me one word more, in my own defence! What prevented me

from destroying the papers at once? A latent reluctance to deprive another man for ever of his child! I thought that the time might come when, on my death-bed, perhaps, I might send those papers to Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, and give him back his daughter."

"But Mrs. Forrest?" exclaimed Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, with an expression of painful anxiety on his countenance, "did she know of this?"

"She knew nothing," replied Mr. Forrest eagerly, "she knows nothing; she believes the child to be her own at this moment. Her state was such at the time, that she was unconscious of the change, and she has always loved the girl as deeply and devotedly as mother could love. I have now said all or nearly all; but to save every question, I may as well at once speak a few words more. My wife, as I have said, knew nothing, but always pressed me to be reconciled to my cousin, Lady Mallory, and to come down hither and see her. I had however traced Sir Andrew Stalbrooke; I knew that he had succeeded to his father; I knew that he lived here, and I had a feeling — a presentiment I may call it — that

if I ventured near him all would be discovered. I therefore delayed as long as possible; but when I came, I treated the idea which had taken possession of my mind as a chimera, a superstition, an idle dream. I saw him speak with his child with pain; but I saw that there was not the slightest consciousness on either part — that there was no suspicion.”

“But there was feeling,” exclaimed Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, “a strange undefinable feeling from the very first hour that I beheld her — a yearning of the paternal heart towards her, such as I never felt but then towards any other human being. And she is like her mother too — very, very like her mother. Oh, sir, if you could but know the agony of my heart when I returned after six or seven months of strict imprisonment, and found her that I loved so dearly dead, and was told that the child that she had borne me was dead also; if you could know all the dark and gloomy feelings which for twenty years have chilled my heart like a wintry shadow, you would be punished enough for that which you have done.”

“And it was my fault,” said Philippina, covering her eyes with her hands. “Fool that I was to be afraid to tell you what I had done. But remember, oh remember, my good, my excellent master, remember that I heard that this man, his wife and family, had all been drowned in crossing the Elbe; the report was current throughout the whole army; every soldier of whom I inquired for him told me, assured me, that it was the case. Remember, Sir Andrew, oh remember, that when I told you the child was dead, I thought she was so; and forgive me if I concealed a part of the truth.”

“I forgive you, Philippina, with all my heart,” replied Sir Andrew, “though you did wrong. I forgive him, I forgive every one, feeling in this moment of joy, when God has been so merciful unto me, that I have no right, even in my secret heart, to feel one shade of relentlessness towards others. No, no! how can I speak one word against any one? how can I use any words but those which the great Forgiver places in the mouth of the once afflicted

father, ‘ This my child was dead and is alive again — was lost and is found? ’ ”

There was something in the father’s joy and satisfaction that touched all hearts. There was scarcely one person present who did not know and admire the character of Sir Andrew Stalbrooke — who did not love in him the master, the landlord, or the friend. The magistrates perhaps had hesitated hitherto how they ought to proceed in regard to Mr. Forrest, whether on any account they could dismiss the charge without further notice. But there was something in the conduct and the demeanour of Sir Andrew himself that overcame all cold scruples.

Sir Arthur Brotherton rose and grasped him by the hand, saying, “ Joy and happiness to you for many, many years, my good and noble friend,” and all the others followed, pressing round him eagerly with every form of congratulation.

Lady Mallory alone sat for a moment or two very pale, and with manifold emotions passing through her bosom. Twice she looked up towards Sir Andrew, but rose at length, and

advanced towards him. The baronet stepped forward instantly to meet her. He might or he might not see into her heart, but he placed his arms round her with paternal tenderness, and kissed her cheek, saying, "Dear Lady Mallory!"

Lady Mallory murmured some inarticulate words about joy to him, and all that were dear to him. But Sir Andrew felt her lean heavily upon his bosom, and divining at once what had happened, clasped his arms more firmly around her, and bore her fainting into the adjacent room.

CHAPTER XIV.

FROM the scene which we have just detailed, there was one of our principal characters excluded, though perhaps we have scarcely a right to call him the hero of the tale; and, although it may seem strange, it was a considerable time before any knowledge of that joyful scene itself reached him. From the period which we have mentioned, till the opening of the assizes, Sir Andrew Stalbrooke visited him almost every day. He spoke to him of many things; but for the first ten days the brow of the baronet remained clouded and sad, and his nephew saw that there was something weighing heavily upon his mind.

Strafford inquired eagerly and anxiously, as may well be supposed, for Edith; but the baronet's replies were any thing but consoling. She was ill — she was very ill, he continued to say. Physicians had been brought from London, but

the fever continued. It would have its course, they said, and they dared not venture for some time to offer any opinion of the result. Sir Andrew would not conceal from his nephew one point of Edith's state, and to the pains and cares of Strafford's imprisonment, were added pangs and anxieties concerning her. For his uncle, too, Strafford was deeply grieved, for he saw that Sir Andrew himself was suffering deeply, and that the pains of his mind were affecting his corporeal health.

At length for two whole days the baronet did not come to the prison, but when he did appear on the third day, the cloud seemed to have passed away from his brow. His face was bright and cheerful again — his look was full of hope and expectation.

“She is better, Ralph,” he said, grasping his nephew's hand; “your dear Edith is better. Yesterday, for the first time these nine days, she recognised me, and she has continued improving ever since.”

The load was removed in a great part from Strafford's heart. His was a hopeful disposition,

and he read in the first smile of returning fortune a promise that she would be his long-tarrying guest. After a moment given to rejoicing for Edith, however, he thought again of his uncle.

“ Oh, my dear uncle,” he said, “ how can Edith or I ever return your kindness? I see that your close attendance upon her, and your anxiety for me, has worn and hurt you.”

“ No, Strafford! no!” replied Sir Andrew with a peculiar smile. “ As to repaying me, you and Edith can do it easily. You shall be a son to me, Strafford, and she a daughter; and as for the rest I have had no closer attendance upon her than my own inclination prompted. She has been well taken care of by many that love her. Mrs. Forrest is with her, Lady Mallory has scarcely ever quitted her night or day, and the physicians say that her recovery is mainly to be attributed to the constant watching of the latter.”

“ God of heaven bless her!” cried Strafford eagerly.

“ So say I, my dear boy! so say I!” cried Sir

Andrew, "and I trust that the ultimate result will be what we all could desire. We must now think of yourself, Strafford. From the turn that affairs have taken from the name of Mr. Waters being struck off from the commission of the peace for his conduct at the coroner's inquest and on other occasions, from the complete exposure of all the manœuvres made use of to prove you guilty, and from various other circumstances which have come to light, there cannot be the slightest doubt of your instant acquittal taking place. But since your imprisonment, Strafford, some matters have occurred which require my immediate presence in London, and I shall remain at Stalbrooke over to-morrow to be perfectly certain before I go that Edith's convalescence is secure. On the following morning I set out for town, and may be absent ten days."

"The business which takes you I hope is not of a painful kind," said Strafford, remarking a slight shade upon his uncle's brow.

"Why, Strafford," answered Sir Andrew with a smile, "I trust we shall find means of

obviating any thing like evil results: but as affairs stand at present, my dear boy, they might deprive you of a large property. But I will tell you more hereafter. In the mean time I will write to you from London, and Lady Mallory has promised to send you a note every day, with a report of Edith's health."

After a short interview Sir Andrew left him; and for some time after, Strafford heard no farther news, except that Edith was recovering rapidly.

At length the increasing noise and bustle in the streets of Lallington gave notice of the approach of the assizes; and innkeepers and country belles prepared to celebrate with joy and festivity, with sport and merry-making, the recurrence of that solemn and painful function which brings the doom of misery, disgrace, and punishment, to so many of our fellow-creatures. Oh, shame upon the barbarous people, where the prison, the gallows, the ball-room, and the feast stand side by side in awful companionship!

Those sounds reached Strafford in the prison,

and told him that the day, which was to decide his own fate too, was fast approaching. It is true he had no apprehension — it is true that he felt perfectly sure of the result ; but yet he could not hear those sounds without some degree of agitation, which he was half angry with himself for feeling.

The governor of the prison, who had been remarkably civil to him, would willingly have alleviated, from time to time, the tediousness of imprisonment by communicating to him any piece of news or rumour or gossip that floated about the country, but Strafford had put a stop to such things from the first, feeling that they only disquieted him ; and refused even to read the journals of the day, burying himself as a refuge from all the annoyances of present things, in reading of the past, in books which had been sent to him from Stalbrooke. He strove to calculate the time, however, which must elapse after the arrival of the judges before his own trial could come on. But on the day which preceded it he felt some degree of anxiety to hear more of what was going on, and some wonder

that the counsel, who his uncle had written to him were engaged to aid him in his defence, had not been with him. Under these circumstances he demanded to speak with the governor, and asked him on his appearance whether the barristers he named had yet arrived in the town.

“ I really do not know, sir,” replied the governor, “ but if you expect them I dare say they are here now, for a carriage and four has just drawn up to the archway; and as I passed I thought I saw Sir Andrew himself speaking with three gentlemen in wigs and gowns.”

As the governor spoke there were steps heard upon the stairs, and in another moment Sir Andrew himself was in the room. But there was radiant satisfaction beaming in his countenance, and he instantly threw his arms round his nephew, exclaiming with tears of joy, “ It is all over, my dear boy ! it is all done ! ”

“ The trial ! ” replied Strafford, “ without my presence ! ”

“ No ! ” replied Sir Andrew, “ no ! not the trial, Strafford, for there will be none. The

grand jury have ignored the bill, and you are free; the warrant is discharged."

"Ay," said Mr. Samuel West, who had followed Sir Andrew into the room, "and the coroner himself will soon be discharged also, though he fancied there was scarcely a precedent for such a thing. But we have fitted him with one, and as his conduct has proved corrupt, let it meet the punishment of corruption."

"But now, Strafford, now," said Sir Andrew, "let us not lose a moment. You are safe — you are free. The carriage is below. There is many an eager heart beating for you at Stalbrooke. There is not an old servant in the house that is not half-way hither to hear the first news. Let us go, my boy! let us go!"

Strafford did not urge one moment's delay; and in five minutes he was out of Lallington on the way to Stalbrooke. The carriage went as fast as it could go,—the postilions, the horses seemed winged with joy. The gates of the park next to Lallington were thrown open, though that way was but seldom used, in order

to let the carriage approach the front of the house more rapidly. There were heads at every window, but the glass doors of the drawing-room were open, and Strafford could see a group beyond that made his heart thrill with hope and joy. Sir Andrew Stalbrooke, however, was the first to spring out of the carriage, and he did so with the step of renewed youth. Without waiting for Strafford he was up the steps in a moment and in the drawing-room, and Edith was clasped in his arms. Strafford was scarcely a step behind him, and the baronet turning round placed her hand in his.

“Take her, Strafford! Take her!” cried Sir Andrew. “Take my dear, my beloved child! I give her to you, Strafford — I, her father, give her to you, and with her all happiness!”

Strafford gazed from the one to the other in surprise; but Lady Mallory advanced, and putting her left arm round Edith, as if to support her, laid her right hand upon Strafford's arm, saying in a gentle and kindly tone, —

“Ask no questions at present, Ralph. Re-

member she is not yet strong. All will be explained hereafter."

Strafford raised Lady Mallory's hand to his lips, exclaiming, "And you, how can I ever thank you, dear Lady Mallory, for all your kindness to her!"

"By saying not one word about it, Ralph," replied Lady Mallory. And lifting her beautiful eyes to Heaven, she murmured, in a voice, inaudible to mortal ears, but heard by God, "O heavenly Father, I have surely now atoned!"

Every thing, as Lady Mallory had promised, was explained to Strafford soon after; and as that has been the case with the reader beforehand, we need not touch upon the subject again.

We have said *every thing*, but we have said so mistakenly. There was one matter which was not explained to any body, and which consequently cannot be explained here. This unsolved riddle was, who was the black girl endowed with such prophetic powers, — what was

her former, and what was her after state? As for Lucy Williams it was not long before she became a happy wife; and Mrs. Ball, wisely removing to the other farm, lived contentedly the neighbour of her daughter-in-law. Meakes, grown into a man of more importance than ever by the share he had had in the events we have described, pursued his avocations as before, and only found one abatement to the joys of his popularity. This was, that as he had full right and liberty granted him to shoot, fish, and take game in any way he pleased upon all the estates in the neighbourhood, he had no opportunity whatsoever of exercising his spirit of adventure in defiance of gamekeepers and lookers-out.

Mr. Forrest proceeded to London, and buried the memories of many unpleasant deeds in that vast smoky solitude. The original passion of his heart, the one which — though mingled at various periods of his life with the impulses which naturally accompany those periods — was the deep-rooted, the fundamental basis of almost all his actions, now day by day twined itself round his heart more and more as years went

on ; and at nearly ninety years of age, he died in a garret by the light of a single rushlight, leaving immense wealth behind him.

In his distress of mind, and what she believed to be his state of utter bereavement, Mrs. Forrest did not abandon her husband, but on the contrary offered to give up the proposed separation, and live with him still if she could comfort or assist him. But he replied with a sneer, that he thought it would be very imprudent to derange the scheme which promised them so much mutual felicity. A tolerable income was settled upon her, and Lady Mallory pleased with her self-devotion held out to her the hand of friendship and affection, begging her to take up her abode with her, and live with her as a sister. Mrs. Forrest gladly agreed ; and to both the arrangement proved a comfort and consolation. Lady Mallory felt and knew that her companion was of inferior mind to herself ; Mrs. Forrest knew it also : but the one leaned willingly on the other for that support, which the other as gladly gave.

Of the fate of Edith and Strafford we shall

speak no more, nor shall we attempt to pursue the after years of Sir Andrew Stalbrooke. His conduct throughout life was that which might be expected from his nature and his character ; and to the end of his days, under the infirmities of age, as in the passions of youth and the trials and sorrows of his middle age, the same bland courtesy — the courtesy of the heart — distinguished him to the close.

THE END.

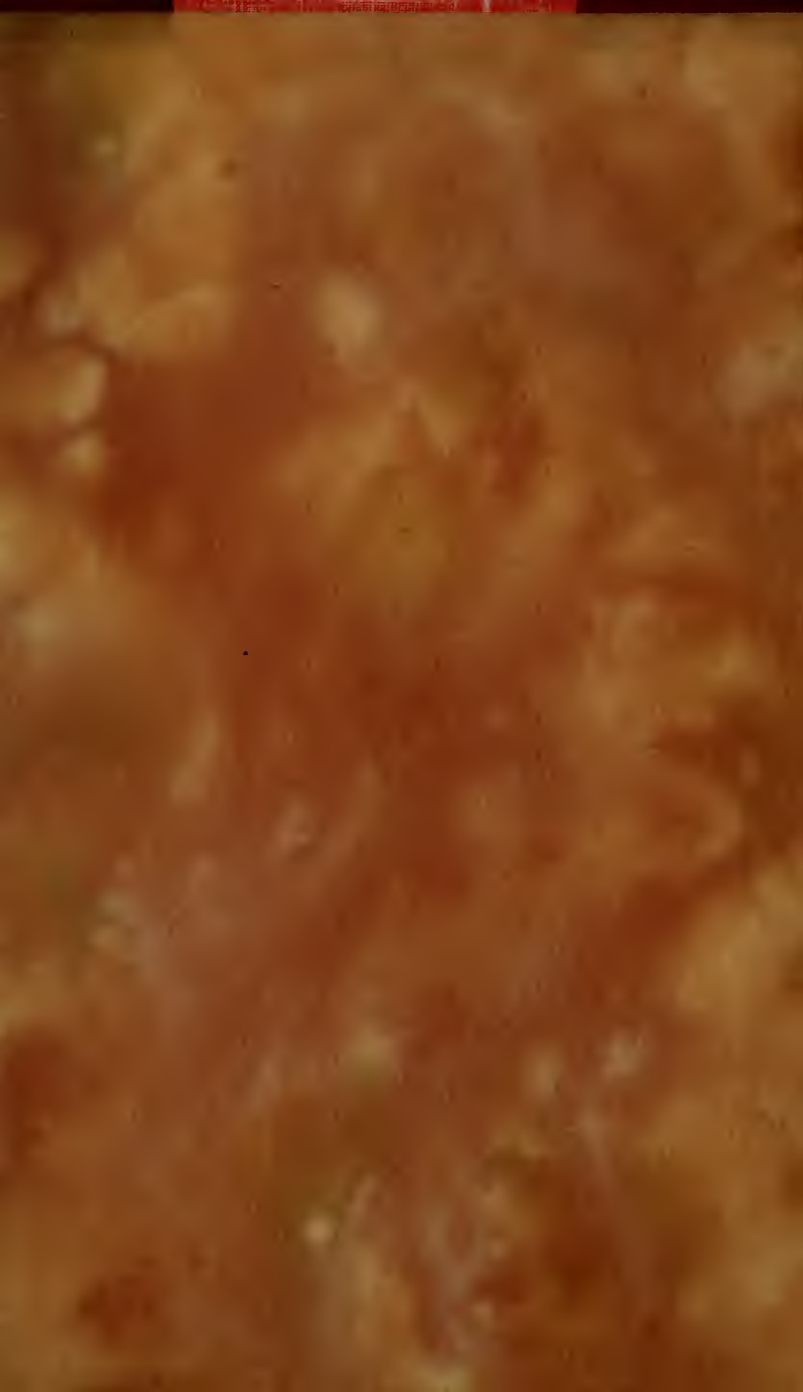
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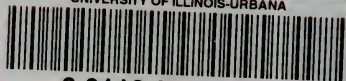
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